



# Research Bulletin

## Profile of NSW Periodic Detainees, 1991

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Department of Corrective Services

## PROFILE OF NSW PERIODIC DETAINEES, 1991

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*A joint project of Programmes Division; Research & Statistics Branch, Strategic Services Division; and  
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## Acknowledgements

This survey was a joint initiative of the Programmes Division and the Prison Operations Directorate. It was requested by Gerry Hay (Executive Director, Prisoner Development) and Tony Kelly (Executive Director, Periodic Detention Centres) in consultation with Alison Pattinson (A/Director, Programmes Division). The funding for the project was provided by the Programmes Division.

The survey was designed by Alison Pattinson in consultation with Simon Eyland (Research Officer, Research and Statistics Branch).

Thanks must go to all of the officers at each Periodic Detention Centre for their time and efforts in conducting the interviews. Thanks must also go to the periodic detainees for their co-operation and willingness to be interviewed. Finally, thanks to Simon Eyland (Research Officer, Research and Statistics Branch) for his assistance with data analysis and to Barbara Thompson (Research Statistician, Research and Statistics Branch) for her comments and suggestions during the writing of this report.

## SUMMARY

This study sought to provide a profile of the characteristics of offenders attending Periodic Detention in NSW. Findings are based on the self reports of a sample of 594 periodic detainees from the ten Periodic Detention Centres in NSW. Interviews were conducted over a four week period in January and February 1991, with the majority of the detainees attending at that time. The major findings are presented below.

### Characteristics of detainees interviewed:

- Sex: 96% were male; 4% were female.
- Country of birth: 79% were Australian born.
- Language: 91% had English as their first language.
- Aboriginality: 6% were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent.
- Age: 12% were 18-24 years; 22% were 25-29 years; 66% were 30 years or over.
- Marital status: 54% were currently single; 39% were married or in de-facto relationship.
- Employment: 56% were currently employed; 34% were unemployed. 9% had been unemployed for two years or longer.
- Educational background: 48% lacked formal school qualifications. 29% had completed an apprenticeship. 11% were currently undertaking a course of study.
- Prior imprisonment: 36% reported that they had previously either been committed to a juvenile institution or an adult gaol or both.

### Reported needs:

- Over half (60%) said that they would like to learn a skill, trade or undertake an educational course. This may relate to the fact that over two-thirds (68%) of the detainees who had not completed an apprenticeship also did not possess other tertiary qualifications.
- One-quarter reported that they had health problems or conditions which physically limited them.

- Half (50%) thought that their being in prison was related to alcohol or other drugs. One out of every eight detainees said that they were dependent on alcohol or other drugs. Some detainees (11%) said that they would like to receive assistance or treatment regarding their drug or alcohol use while they were in periodic detention.
- One-third of the detainees expressed interest in receiving information on how to avoid AIDS infection.
- Few (1%) considered that they required an interpreter. There was no one ethnic group which was more in need of interpreters than others.

### Management issues:

- Over one-third of those attending PDCs on weekends (38%) said that they would be interested in attending mid-week detention.

## INTRODUCTION

Periodic Detention became a sentencing option in NSW in 1971. It is an order of the court which provides that a person serves a sentence of imprisonment on weekends (or any other two days during the week), remaining at liberty in the community during the rest of the week. Detainees report to the Periodic Detention Centre (PDC) at 7pm one night (e.g., Friday night) and remain until 4,30pm two days later (e.g., Sunday). During their two full days in detention, teams of detainees perform work in the community.

The aim of this survey was to provide previously unavailable base line data about periodic detainees in custody in NSW. Information on periodic detainees' current health, their educational and employment background, their criminal history and other personal information was sought. The survey focussed on providing a broad range of information rather than concentrating on any specific area in detail.

The survey was requested by Gerry Hay (Executive Director, Prisoner Development) following a Departmental investigation seeking a review of the characteristics of offenders presently held in the Periodic Detention Centres in NSW. Further, Tony Kelly (Executive Director, Periodic Detention Centres) requested this type of information in order to facilitate the planning of operational and program requirements of the Periodic Detention Centres in NSW as an expansion of Periodic Detention Centres is currently underway.

This study was designed so that the information collected could be used to assess the need for programs in Periodic Detention Centres. It was intended that the data from this study could be used to assess the type, level and location of any required programs and whether such programs are already provided within the community or need to be provided within Detention Centres.

## METHODOLOGY

### Overview

This study is based on the self reports of a sample of 594 periodic detainees from the ten Periodic Detention Centres (P.D.C.'s) in NSW. Interviews were conducted by the officers on duty at each centre over a four week period commencing on 16th January and ending on 16th February, 1991. The P.D.C.'s in which the interviews were conducted are listed in Table 1. Nine of these P.D.C.'s are for men while Merinda is the P.D.C. for women detainees.

### Sample

The 594 periodic detainees interviewed included 569 men and 25 women. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the total number of live warrants for periodic detention sentences held in each centre for the weeks of interview, the number of periodic detainees who actually attended the centre for these weeks and the total number of people interviewed in each P.D.C.

Table 1 illustrates the large difference between the total number of warrants issued and the numbers attending. Using values from the weekly count of periodic detainees during the week ending 3rd February 1991, for example, only 609 of the 1033 with periodic detention warrants (59%) actually attended. Of the 424 who did not attend 87 had lodged an appeal against their sentence, 46 were in full-time custody and 138 were in the process of being breached under Section 25 of the Periodic Detention Act. Non-attendance may be for a short time only, for example, in the case of sickness. However, in many cases, the person had never reported for detention.

The 594 periodic detainees were interviewed from an average number of 624 periodic detainees who attended their detention in NSW over the relevant periods. Since the turnover of attending periodic detainees and the number of those on leave of absence or sick was comparatively small for each centre, the sample interviewed contains a high proportion of the attending periodic detainees. However, the sample does not represent the people who did not attend their periodic detention. To have made this survey representative of all periodic detainees in NSW rather than of those attending only, efforts would have needed to be made to track down the people who did not attend their detention and interview these non-attenders.

### **Procedure**

A standardized interview schedule was used to interview the periodic detainees in this study.

Before the interviews commenced a letter written by the Assistant Director, Programmes Division and countersigned by the Assistant Executive Director, Periodic Detention Programme was sent out to each officer in charge of a P.D.C. The letter outlined that the purpose of the survey was to provide the Department with information on the general characteristics of the periodic detainees presently in custody in NSW. As mentioned above, the interviews were conducted by the officers on duty at each P.D.C. The number of interviewers conducting the survey varied for each centre and included the following: Long Bay (Main & Annexe) (8); Long Bay (Mid-week) (2); Emu Plains (5); Silverwater (2); Parramatta (2); Campbelltown (2); Tomago (1); St. Heliers (3); Windsor (3); and Merinda (2).

As outlined above, these interviews took place over a period of approximately four weeks beginning on 16th January and ending on 16th February, 1991. Most of the interviews were conducted on the weekends at the centre whilst the offenders were on detention, except for Long Bay Mid-Week P.D.C. where the interviews were conducted during the week. It should be noted that in some detention centres the interviews took place over only one weekend while in others interviews were conducted over two, three or four weekends (see Table 1).

### **The Survey Schedule**

The survey questionnaire was jointly designed by the Programmes Division and the Research and Statistics Branch, Strategic Services Division of the NSW Department of Corrective Services. The survey consisted of seven sections which are outlined below.

#### **1. Demographic Characteristics:**

The detainees were asked their age, whether English was their first language, whether an interpreter was required, their country of birth, their country of citizenship, whether they were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and their marital status.

#### **2. Educational Background and Aspirations:**

The offenders were asked what was the last grade they had completed at school, whether they had completed an apprenticeship, whether they were currently undertaking educational studies, and whether they would like to learn a new skill or trade or to undertake an educational course. Questions were also included which attempted to measure the self-reported current literacy level of those interviewed.

### 3. Employment Background:

The detainees were asked whether they were currently employed, unemployed, a student or a pensioner. If they were unemployed they were asked the length of time they had been unemployed. All detainees were also asked what their usual job was, whether they worked shiftwork and whether they would be interested in attending a P.D.C. during the middle of the week.

### 4. Health Problems Including Problems with Drugs:

The detainees were asked if they were currently experiencing any health problems which physically limited them, whether they were currently taking any prescribed medication, whether they perceived that they were dependent on drugs or alcohol, whether they needed help to overcome a drug problem or an alcohol problem, whether they had received help in the past for their drug and/or alcohol use and whether they would like to receive help for their drug and/or alcohol use whilst on detention.

### 5. Drug Use and Crime:

The detainees were asked whether they had taken any drugs or alcohol twenty-four hours preceding their most serious offence and whether they perceived that their being in prison was related to their drug use.

### 6. Knowledge of AIDS:

Questions about whether the respondents had received information on the transmission of the AIDS virus and whether they would be interested in gaining further information were asked, as well as whether the interviewees would be interested in helping in the organisation of AIDS information sessions if they were conducted at their detention centre.

### 7. Criminal History:

The detainees were asked whether they had ever been committed to a juvenile institution and whether they had been sentenced to adult gaol previously.

**Table 1: Total Number of Live Periodic Detention Warrants, Numbers Attending and Total Number Interviewed**

Week Ending	20.1.91 Tot. Att.	27.1.91 Tot. Att.	3.2.91 Tot. Att.	10.2.91 Tot. Att.	17.2.91 Tot. Att.	Number Interv.
Long Bay (Main & Annexe)			356 212		354 196	186
Long Bay (Mid-week)	49 40					40
Emu Plains		104 66	104 66	106 72	106 75	74
Silverwater			100 59			40
Parramatta		43 21	44 20			26
Campbelltown			45 27	49 30		28
Tomago			119 75	122 86		75
St. Heliers			26 19			19
Windsor	122 75	117 69	114 68			81
Merinda				79 34		25
<b>Total No.</b>						<b>594</b>

## RESULTS

### 1. Demographic Characteristics

#### a. Sex

Of the 594 detainees interviewed 96% were men while 4% were women.

#### b. Age

There was quite a wide range of ages of the detainees interviewed. The youngest detainees interviewed were eighteen years of age while the oldest detainee was sixty-one. Table 2 below gives a clearer picture of the ages of the detainees.

Table 2 shows that about two-thirds of the respondents interviewed for this study (65.6%) were thirty years and over.

#### c. Ethnicity

Table 3, below, displays the places of birth of those interviewed. This table shows that the majority of the sample were born in Australia (78.8%). Thirty-six detainees (6.1%) reported being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. Quite a few respondents were born in Europe (5.9%). The places of birth in Europe included Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, Hungary, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

Of the sample who were born outside of Australia (21.0%), the majority (100 out of 125) had been in Australia for more than five years,

**Table 2: Ages of the Detainees Interviewed**

	Men		Women		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
	(N=568)		(N=25)		(N=593)*	
18-24	70	12.3	2	8.0	72	12.1
25-29	126	22.2	6	24.0	132	22.2
30-34	129	22.7	7	28.0	136	22.9
35-39	143	25.2	7	28.0	150	25.3
40-49	71	12.5	2	8.0	73	12.3
50 and over	29	5.1	1	4.0	30	5.1

\* one missing case.

**Table 3: Place of Birth of the Detainees Interviewed**

	No.	%
	(N=594)	
Australia	468	78.8
Europe	35	5.9
U.K.	31	5.2
New Zealand	20	3.4
Asia	10	1.7
Other Oceania (excluding Aust. & N.Z.)	9	1.5
Middle East	8	1.3
Africa	6	1.0
Latin America	3	0.5
U.S.A.	2	0.3
Papua New Guinea	1	0.2
Indo-China	1	0.2



while the remainder (25 out of 125) had been in Australia for less than five years.

Most of the detainees held Australian citizenship (87.9%). Others held English citizenship (4.0%), New Zealand citizenship (3.9%), and citizenship in a variety of European countries (2.3%). The rest of the sample (2.0%) held citizenship in countries such as the United States, countries within Latin America, within Africa, and within Asia and other oceanic countries (Fiji, Samoa).

For the greater proportion of the sample, English was their first language (91.2%). For the rest of the sample, the first language spoken included Italian, Croatian, French, Spanish, German and Turkish, Chinese, Arabic and other oceanic languages (Fijian, Samoan).

Consequently, since the majority of the sample stated English was their first language, 98.7% of those interviewed claimed that they did not need an interpreter. There was no one ethnic group which was more in need of interpreters than others. Individuals reported requiring interpreters in the following languages: Italian, Croatian, French, German, Spanish, Indonesian and Samoan.

**d. Marital Status**

Over half of the detainees interviewed were currently single (53.9%), 20.4% were married, 18.5% were living in a de-facto relationship and 6.2% were separated or divorced.

**2. Educational Background and Aspirations**

In order to gain an indication of the educational background of the periodic detainees interviewed the respondents were asked: what was the last grade they had completed at school, if they had completed an apprenticeship and/or if they had any further educational qualifications. Respondents were also asked about their educational aspirations, that is whether they were presently undertaking a course of study and/or whether in the future they would like to acquire new skills. Further an attempt was made to ascertain the detainees' current literacy ability.

**a. Educational Background**

Table 4 shows that a substantial proportion of the sample interviewed did not possess formal school qualifications as almost half (48.0%) stated that the last grade they achieved in school was Year 9 or less.

	No. (N=594)	%
Year 9 or less	285	48.0
School Certificate	234	39.4
Higher School Certificate	42	7.1
Tertiary Qualified	33	5.6

**b. Completion of an Apprenticeship**

Almost a third of the periodic detainees interviewed (29.3%) reported having completed an apprenticeship. However, of those who had not completed an apprenticeship 68.0% did not possess tertiary qualifications and 38.5% had left school in Year 9 or earlier. These results suggests a sizeable number of detainees who were largely unqualified.

For the 174 detainees (29.3%) who had completed an apprenticeship, the following table outlines the most common types of apprenticeships they had completed.

Table 5 suggests that the range of apprenticeships completed was quite diverse. Moreover, the table shows that detainees reported completing courses which are not traditionally viewed as trade based ranging from engineering to graphic arts and advertising.

**c. Currently Undertaking Educational Studies**

As we have just outlined, almost a third of the detainees interviewed had completed an apprenticeship. However, it was found that a relatively smaller proportion of detainees (11.0% of the sample) were currently undertaking a course of study. Table 6 outlines the most common courses of study the respondents listed.

**Table 5: Most Common Apprenticeships Completed**

	No. (N=174)	%
Mechanic	22	12.7
Carpenter	18	10.3
Fitter & Turner	18	10.3
Electrician	9	5.2
Bricklayer/Concrete/ Plasterer	8	4.6
Spray Painter	8	4.6
Engineering	8	4.6
Boilermaker	7	4.0
Chef	7	4.0
Welder	6	3.4
Plumber	6	3.4
Builder	5	2.9
Sheet Metal Worker	5	2.9
Business Management/ Accountancy/Commerce	5	2.9
Advert./Graphic Arts	2	1.1
Other	37	21.3
Not Specified	3	1.7
<b>Total No. Who Had Completed an Apprenticeship</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>29.3</b>
<b>Total No. Who Had Not Completed an Apprenticeship</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>70.7</b>

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents currently undertaking a course reported learning a trade (23.1%). These included learning skills to become a spray painter, bricklayer, rigger, electrician, plumber, panel beater, mechanic, carpenter, welder, truck driver, printer or landscaper. There were other educational courses mentioned ranging from computing to engineering. Other courses of study mentioned by a small number of detainees were quite diverse and included learning to read and write English, learning another language, becoming a pilot, becoming a probation and parole officer, learning the skills to be an audio-visual technician.

Of the group who were currently completing a course of study, the most popular type of institution for study was technical college

**Table 6: Most Common Educational Studies Detainees Were Currently Completing**

	No. (N=65)	%
Trade	15	23.1
Computing	7	10.8
Accounting/ Economics/ Commerce	6	9.2
Engineering	6	9.2
Gaining Educational Qualifications**	5	7.7
Other	14	29.2
Course Not Specified	12	18.5
<b>Total No. Undertaking Course</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>11.0</b>
<b>Total No. Not Undertaking Course</b>	<b>527*</b>	<b>89.0</b>

\* two cases missing

\*\* this included respondents who were studying for either their School Certificate, their Higher School Certificate or undertaking tertiary study.

(40.0%) followed by university (11.0%) and high school (3.0%). Other detainees reported undertaking courses through correspondence study, the Sydney City Mission Employment Programme and the Australian Society of Accountants. It should be noted that for this question there was quite a large non-response rate, 37% of the respondents failed to specify their place of study.

#### **d. Educational Aspirations**

Even though only a small proportion of offenders interviewed were currently completing an educational course, a large percentage (59.8%) seemed quite eager to learn new skills, a trade and/or undertake further educational studies. The following table lists the most common types of skills the detainees reported wishing to learn.

**Table 7: Most Common Types of Skills Detainees Wished To Learn**

	No. (N=350)	%
Mechanic	37	10.6
Carpenter	30	8.6
Welder	20	5.7
Builder/Drafter/Scaffolder	15	4.3
Bricklayer/Plasterer	12	3.4
Electrician	12	3.4
Gardener/Horticulture	12	3.4
Landscaper	11	3.2
Service (Bar work, Cook)	11	3.2
Spray Painter/Panelbeater	9	2.6
Other Trade-Related Skills	46	13.1
<b>Total Trade-Related Skills</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>61.4</b>
Business Management (including accountancy, commerce)	21	6.0
Computing	18	5.1
Learn to Read & Write	11	3.2
Social Work/Counselling	10	2.6
Engineering	9	2.3
Complete Secondary Education	6	1.7
Other	23	6.6
<b>Total Other Skills</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>28.0</b>
Not Specified	37	10.6
<b>Total No. Who Wished to Learn a Skill</b>	<b>350</b>	<b>59.8</b>
<b>Total No. Who Did Not Wish to Learn a Skill</b>	<b>235*</b>	<b>40.2</b>

\* nine missing cases

In examining Table 7 above, it can be seen that the majority of detainees who wished for further skills aspired to learn skills in a trade-related area (61.4% of the sample who wanted to learn a new skill). However, as Table 7 also outlines, there was a significant number of detainees who wished to gain professional qualifications or undertake other educational studies (28.0% of the respondents who reported that they wanted to learn a new skill). Further, it is interesting to note that some detainees

responded that they needed to learn basic skills such as reading and writing.

These findings are of relevance to Departmental staff seeking to develop programmes for the periodic detainees whilst on detention.

### **e. Literacy**

Detainees were asked seven questions in order to assess their literacy skills. They were asked how often they needed to get help from family or friends in performing a range of tasks. Their responses are presented in Table 8. Like other areas of this study, literacy was based on the detainees' self reports. The detainees were not given tasks which would have required their using their literacy skills.

From Table 8, it can be seen that only a small proportion of the detainees reported "always" requiring help with any of the tasks. Only three detainees (0.5%) reported "always" requiring help with all seven tasks. The majority (80.0%) reported "never" requiring help with any of the seven tasks.

## **3. Employment Background**

### **a. Employment Status**

Table 9 displays the detainees' current employment status.

This table shows that there were quite a few detainees who reported being currently unemployed (34.2%) or on a pension (6.7%).

Those who said they were unemployed, were asked how long they had been unemployed. Table 10 lists the length of time these people reported being unemployed.

**Table 8: Frequency with which Detainees Reported Requiring Help with Literacy Tasks**  
Frequency help required (%)

Task	Never	Sometimes	Always
Reading written information from Government Agencies or business	84.9	12.2	2.9
Reading newspaper articles	91.0	6.6	2.4
Filling out Medicare Claim forms	91.7	5.6	2.7
Writing notes and letters	87.8	9.7	2.5
Reading instructions on a medicine bottle	94.6	4.1	1.4
Finding a telephone number in the telephone book	93.7	4.6	1.7
Working out the amount of change you should get	96.3	2.9	0.9

**Table 9: Employment Status of the Detainees Interviewed**

	No. (N=594)	%
Employed	333	56.1
Unemployed	203	34.2
Pension	40	6.7
Study	9	1.5
Not Specified	9	1.5

**Table 10: Length of Time the Detainees Interviewed Reported Being Unemployed**

	No. (N=213)	%
<6 months	95	44.6
<1 year	28	13.1
<1 1/2 years	19	8.9
<2 years	14	6.6
<3 years	17	8.0
<4 years	5	2.3
<5 years	4	1.9
>5 years	13	6.1
Not Specified	18	8.5

Table 10 indicates that there were a significant number of detainees who had been unemployed for two years and longer (53). These 53 detainees constitute 8.9% of the sample of detainees interviewed. This group of people therefore may require special help in readjusting to a working lifestyle.

#### ***b. Type of Employment***

The detainees were asked what was their usual job. Table 11 lists the most common types of jobs reported.

In examining Table 11 it can be seen that just over half of the detainees interviewed had worked in trade-related fields (51.3%). This might be expected given that, as we have discussed earlier (see section 2b.), over a third of the detainees had completed an apprenticeship. This group of people therefore possessed some type of qualifications. However, only a small proportion of the sample had worked in jobs which require professional training such as an economist or as an engineer. Further, quite a few detainees (22.7%) had worked in largely unskilled jobs which did not require any qualifications.

The majority of detainees reported that they did not usually work shiftwork. Approximately one-quarter (24.2%) said that they did work shifts.

**Table 11: Usual Job of the Periodic Detainees Interviewed**

	No. (N=594)	%
<b>Trade-Related Jobs</b>		
Service Industry (chefs, bar-person, hotel work)	54	9.1
Bricklayer	37	6.2
Mechanic	24	4.0
Spray Painter/Panel beater	18	3.0
Builder (Scaffolder)	15	2.5
Electrician	14	2.4
Carpenter	11	1.9
Machinist	11	1.9
Plumber	9	1.5
Fitter (Maintenance fitter)	9	1.5
Welder	8	1.3
Tiler	8	1.3
Painter	7	1.2
Gardener	7	1.2
Boilermaker	5	0.8
Rigger	5	0.8
Refrigeration Mechanic	4	0.7
Printer	4	0.7
Butcher	4	0.7
Other	51	8.6
<b>Total Trade-Related Work</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>51.3</b>
<b>Other Jobs</b>		
Unskilled*	124	20.1
Driver (Truck, Bus, Courier)	22	3.7
Managerial	21	3.5
Storeman	19	3.2
Clerical	15	2.5
Self-Employed	10	1.7
Sales Representative	9	1.5
Engineer	4	0.7
Business (Economist)	4	0.7
Media (Advertising)	3	0.5
Computing	3	0.5
Other	16	2.7
Not Specified	39	6.6
<b>Total Other Jobs</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>48.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>594</b>	

\* Unskilled category includes labourers, cleaners, factory hands, removalists, garbage collectors.

**c. Attending Periodic Detention During the Middle of the Week**

The detainees were asked whether, given the opportunity, they would attend a periodic detention centre during the middle of the week. Table 12 outlines their responses.

It should be noted that this question would not have relevance for the 40 detainees (or 6.7% of the sample) interviewed at the Long Bay Mid-Week Periodic Centre who are already attending their detention during the middle of the week. If we exclude this group of people from our sample of 594, we are left with 60.3% of the sample stating they would not be interested in attending mid-week detention. (Further information on which PDC those interested in attending mid-week were currently attending can be found in Appendix Table A.1.)

Those detainees (n=334) who stated that they would not attend a periodic detention centre mid-week were asked the reasons why. Table 13 outlines the most frequent responses to this question.

The majority of those who did not wish to attend mid-week (66.8%) said that attending periodic detention during the middle of the week would interfere with their work. Two respondents felt that they would not be able to get their unemployment benefit if they were on detention. Many detainees did not give a reason (15.3%) for not wanting to attend detention during the middle of the week, while others said that they were simply not interested and/or they could not see that it would provide them with any benefit (6.3%).

**Table 12: Responses to Attending Periodic Detention Mid-Week**

	All Detainees		Excluding Detainees from Long Bay Mid-Week P.D.C.	
	No. (N=594)	%	No. (N=554)	%
Would Attend	251	42.3	211*	38.1
Would Not Attend	334	56.2	334	60.3
Did Not Specify	9	1.5	9	1.5

\* It was assumed that of the 251 detainees, the 40 detainees from the Long Bay Mid-Week P.D.C. would have responded that they would attend detention during the middle of the week.

**Table 13: Reasons the Detainees Interviewed Would not Attend Periodic Detention Centre Mid-Week**

	No. (N=334)	%
Work Commitments	223	66.8
Not Interested	21	6.3
Inconvenient	16	4.8
Family Commitments	12	3.6
Study Commitments	6	1.7
Being Released Soon	5	1.5
Not Specified	51	15.3

#### 4. Health Problems, Prescribed Medication and Other Drug Use

##### a. Health problems

Just over one-quarter of the sample (25.3%) reported that they had current health problems or conditions which physically limited them. (The percentages reporting health problems from each of the P.D.C.s is shown in Table A.1., in the Appendix.) The following table lists the most common responses of those who reported having problems with their health.

Table 14 outlines that of the detainees who reported having health problems the majority reported physical problems with their body or injuries to their body (44.9%). The most common responses here were: back trouble (15), neck injuries (5), broken leg (4), injuries to knee

**Table 14: Most Common Health Problems of the Periodic Detainees Interviewed**

	No. (N=149)	%
Body Injuries and/or Problems	67	44.9
Asthma	23	15.4
Heart Conditions*	17	11.4
Epilepsy	5	3.4
Arthritis	4	2.7
Diabetes	4	2.7
Drug dependency/ Alcoholism	4	2.7
Ulcers/Cysts	4	2.7
Other	11	7.4
Not Specified	10	6.7
<b>Total Who Had Health Problems</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>25.3</b>
<b>Total Who Had No Problems</b>	<b>439**</b>	<b>74.7</b>

\* includes high blood pressure, heart attacks, blood clots, angina

\*\* six missing cases

or ankle (4), one leg amputated (3), hand fractures (2) and whiplash (2).

The proportion suffering from injuries to their body or other problems is therefore quite sizeable and in planning work schemes or developing programmes for these detainees,

these findings should be kept in mind. As well, special consideration and care may need to be taken in working with those detainees in our sample who reported suffering from poor heart conditions and medical conditions such as diabetes and epilepsy.

**b. Prescribed Medication**

Approximately one-quarter (24.3%) of the detainees interviewed reported that they were currently taking prescribed medication. The following table lists the most common types of medication detainees reported taking.

The respiratory system drugs referred to in Table 15 included Ventolin and Becotide and the cardiovascular drugs included Tenormin, Visken, Renectic, Anginine, Adalat, Betaloc, Zuntac and Kantrix.

The detainees were asked the length of time they had been receiving this medication. Table 16 outlines this information.

From Table 16 it can be seen that a significant proportion of detainees on prescribed medication had been taking that medication for a substantial period of time.

**Table 16: Length of Time Taking This Prescribed Medication**

	No. (N=143)	%
6 mths & under	33	23.1
1 yr & under	15	10.5
2 yrs & under	15	10.5
3 yrs & under	15	10.5
4 yrs & under	5	3.5
5 yrs & under	8	5.6
over 5 yrs	47	32.9
Not Specified	5	3.5

**c. Perceived Drug Dependence**

One out of every eight detainees (12.5%) said that they were dependent on alcohol or other drugs. (Refer to Table A.2. in the Appendix to find out which P.D.C.s these detainees were attending.) A minority (1.5%) did not answer this question. The drugs on which the detainees thought they were dependent are presented in Table 17. From this table it can be seen that alcohol and opiates were the most frequently reported drugs of dependence.

**Table 15: Most Common Types of Prescribed Medication**

	No.* (N=143)	%
Methadone	35	24.5
Respiratory System Drugs	25	17.5
Cardiovascular Drugs	17	11.9
Anti-depressants	16	11.2
Analgesics	15	10.5
Benzodiazepines	9	6.3
Other	21	14.7
Not Specified	5	3.5
<b>Total no. taking prescribed medication</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>24.3</b>
<b>Total no. not taking prescribed medication</b>	<b>446*</b>	<b>75.7</b>

\* five missing cases

**Table 17: Type of Drug on which Detainees Reported being Dependent**

	No.* (N=74)	%
Alcohol	19	25.7
Heroin	6	8.1
Other opiates	23	31.1
Minor analgesics	5	6.8
Amphetamines	1	1.4
Cannabis	1	1.4
Hallucinogens	1	1.4
Other drugs/combination of drugs	6	8.1
Drug type not specified	12	16.2
<b>Total no. dependent on drugs</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>12.6</b>
<b>Total no. not dependent on drugs</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>87.4</b>

\* nine missing cases

#### **d. Help Required with Alcohol and/or Drug Problems**

Detainees were asked firstly whether they needed help to overcome an alcohol abuse problem and secondly whether they needed help to overcome a drug abuse problem. A small proportion of detainees reported requiring help for alcohol abuse (5.9%) and/or drug abuse (6.7%). (Refer also to Table A.2. in the Appendix.)

That forty detainees (6.7%) reported requiring help to overcome an alcohol problem is interesting because if we refer to our earlier discussion, we found that only 22 detainees (3.7% of sample) reported being dependent on alcohol. It may be that since alcohol is a drug which is socially acceptable, people are less likely to perceive they are dependent on this drug but do feel that alcohol has caused them problems.

One-quarter of the detainees (25.3%) said that they had received help in the past for their alcohol or drug abuse problem. They mentioned receiving a wide range of different types of help. These types of help received in the past most frequently included Narcotics Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous (5.4%), individual counselling (3.4%), attendance at clinics and/or hospitals (3.4%), and a range of specific drug and alcohol programs (7.6%) such as W.H.O.S., Odyssey House, Teen Challenge Rehab, GROW, etc.

Some detainees (11.3%) said that they would like to receive assistance or treatment regarding their drug or alcohol use while they were in periodic detention. (Refer to Table A.2 in the Appendix to find out where these detainees were serving their periodic detention.) The most frequent types of assistance or treatment requested were individual counselling (3.6%), Alcoholics Anonymous (1.0%), general drug and alcohol programs (1.0%) or methadone (1.0%). Some detainees who said that they would like to receive assistance were unable to specify the type of assistance they required.

#### **5. Drug Use and Crime**

When asked whether they had taken any alcohol or other drugs (legal or illegal) in the twenty-four hours before they had committed their current offence, approximately half of the detainees (56%) reported that they had done so. The drug most frequently reported being used was alcohol, sometimes in conjunction with another drug (see Table 18).

The types of drugs other than alcohol most frequently reported as being used in the twenty-four hours before their current offence (together with the number of detainees who reported using them) were cannabis (33 detainees or 5.6%), heroin (24 detainees or 4.0%), benzodiazepines (16 or 2.7%), amphetamines (5 detainees or 0.8%), and hallucinogens (3 detainees or 0.5%). Some detainees used more than one type of drug (other than alcohol) during the twenty-four hours prior to their current offence.

Half of the detainees (50.0%) thought that their being in prison was related to alcohol or other drugs. (Refer to Table A.2 in the Appendix for more information.) Almost half (48.5%) thought that their being in prison was not related to alcohol or other drugs. A small proportion (1.5%) were unsure of whether their imprisonment was related to drugs.

**Table 18: Reported Drug (legal or illegal) Usage In the 24 Hours Prior to Current Offence**

Drug type	No. (N=594)	%
Alcohol only	231	38.9
Alcohol & other drugs	26	4.4
Other drugs only	62	10.4
Type of drug not specified	12	2.0
Neither alcohol nor other drugs	254	42.8
No response	9	1.5



## 6. Knowledge of AIDS

In this section the detainees' knowledge of AIDS, the sources from which they had received information on AIDS and whether they would be interested in helping to organise AIDS information sessions if they were conducted in their detention centre, are outlined.

### a. Had Received Information on AIDS

It was found that close to seven out of every ten detainees interviewed (68.5%) reported having had received information on the transmission of the AIDS virus. For those detainees who reported having knowledge of AIDS, Table 19 outlines the most common sources of information.

Table 19 shows that the most frequent source of information (39.2%) was reported to be the general media (watching television segment

**Table 19: Most Common Sources of Information on Transmission of AIDS**

	No. (N=401)	%
Media	157	39.2
Medical Staff/Hospitals	63	15.7
In Gaol or while on Parole	47	11.7
Pamphlets/Literature on AIDS	38	9.5
Drug and Alcohol Clinics & Counsellors	26	6.5
Health and Community Centres	16	4.0
Educational Institutions	13	3.2
Family and friends	5	1.3
Other	21	5.2
Source of Information Not Specified	22	5.5
<b>Total who had received information</b>	<b>401*</b>	<b>68.5</b>
<b>Total who had not received information</b>	<b>184**</b>	<b>31.4</b>

\* number does not add up to total because some respondents specified more than one source of information on AIDS.

\*\* nine missing cases

and reading newspaper reports on AIDS). An interesting finding is the number of detainees who reported gaining their knowledge of AIDS whilst in gaol or whilst they were on parole (11.7%).

Once again these results are based on the detainees' self reports. There was no check on the extent or the accuracy of the information on AIDS transmission recalled by detainees.

### b. Interest In Receiving Information on How to Avoid AIDS Infection

The detainees were further asked whether they were interested in receiving information on how to avoid infection of the HIV/AIDS virus. It was found that a third of the detainees interviewed (33.3%) expressed interest in this. (See also Table A.1 in the Appendix for more information.) Of this percentage, 22.7% had already received information on AIDS but were interested in gaining further information and 10.6% had received information on AIDS and were not interested in gaining further information. The detainees who did express interest were then asked what form they would like the information to take. The question was presented in a closed question format and the following categories were used: Talks; Pamphlets/Brochures/Videos; One-to-One.

Table 20 shows that 69.7% of the detainees who required information on how to avoid infection said that they would prefer to receive pamphlets/brochures/videos while 29.3% wanted some one-to-one consultations on AIDS.

**Table 20: Form of Information on AIDS Required**

Form of Information	No. (N=198)	%
P.B.V.*	61	30.8
Talks/P.B.V./One-to-one	45	22.7
Talks	44	22.7
Talks/P.B.V.	32	16.2
One-to-One	13	6.6
Not Specified	3	1.5

\* Denotes Pamphlets/Brochures/Videos.

**Table 21: Reasons the Detainees Interviewed Reported not Requiring Information on How to Avoid AIDS Infection**

	No. (N=387)	%
Know Enough Already	261	67.4
Does Not Feel Need	64	16.5
No Reason Given	42	10.9
Doesn't care	14	3.6
Other	6	1.6

Those detainees who responded that they were not interested in information on AIDS (65.2%) were asked reasons why. Table 21 suggests that the majority of respondents who did not wish more information on AIDS perceived that they had amassed sufficient knowledge of AIDS and they did not feel that they required more information (67.4%). Responses from this group of people included:

"know it all and have done first aid course";

"I know plenty and I have tests done regularly".

There were quite a few respondents who answered that they did not perceive AIDS to be a problem (16.5%). These people assumed that their lifestyle excluded them from contracting the AIDS virus. Others expressed a general lack of concern or apathy on the subject (3.6%). Some of the responses from these detainees are provided below:

"I'm not a druggie";

"Because I have a girlfriend";

"I have been married to the same woman for 25 years and I have never played up";

"Don't want to know what it does, don't care what it does".

**c. Interest in Providing Assistance In AIDS Seminars**

Detainees were further asked whether they would be interested in helping organise AIDS information sessions if they were conducted whilst they were on detention. Almost half of those interviewed (44.4%) reported interest in

this. Table 22 below lists the types of assistance these respondents perceived themselves giving.

Table 22 suggests that many of those interviewed did not have a clear conception of what role they would play if AIDS seminars were conducted, as 38.9% responded they would do whatever was needed and 12.6% of this sample's only response was that they would "take part".

**Table 22: Type of Assistance Able to Provide for AIDS Information Sessions**

	No. (N=262)	%
Whatever Was Required	102	38.9
Present Talks/Share Experiences	43	16.4
Would Take Part	28	10.7
Help in the Organisation	25	9.5
Provide Counselling	14	5.3
Help in Distributing Information	11	4.2
Conduct Research	6	2.3
Promote it	5	1.9
Other	9	3.4
Not Specified	19	7.3
<b>Total Would Help</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>44.4</b>
<b>Total Would Not Help</b>	<b>328*</b>	

\* four missing cases

However, there were significant numbers of detainees who did possess clear ideas on the role they could play. Of interest especially is the large number of detainees who envisaged themselves playing a humanitarian or caring type of role either in sharing experiences in group talks (16.4%) or by counselling others (5.3%). Examples of such responses include:

" share past experience of what can happen";

"I'm a recovering drug addict, I'd like to tell people how detrimental it's all been".

## 7. Criminal History

The criminal background of the detainees interviewed was ascertained through self-report. Detainees were asked whether they had been to a juvenile institution and whether they had previously been sentenced to an adult gaol. In addition, interviewers were requested to list up to five most serious offences from the detainee's PDC record.

### ***a. Numbers of Detainees Who Had Been to a Juvenile Institution or Had been Sentenced to Gaol Previously***

One hundred and fourteen detainees, or 19.2%, reported that they had previously been committed to a juvenile institution.

The detainees were further asked if they had been sentenced to gaol previously. It was found that 163 detainees or just over one-quarter of those interviewed (27.4%) reported having been sentenced to a gaol previously.

Further, our results showed that 215 detainees (36.2%) had either attended a juvenile institution or had been previously sentenced to an adult gaol or both. Therefore, our results suggest that there was quite a sizeable number of detainees who did have a history of criminal behaviour.

However, in interpreting our results we must remember that the information is based on the self report of the detainees. An attempt to check the records of the detainees interviewed by using the computerised Offender Records System (ORS) was made; however, in most cases no information was available on the detainees from that source.

### ***c. Most Serious Offence Committed***

The most serious offence the detainees committed for their current periodic detention was examined. Table 23 outlines these offences.

Table 23 shows that the commonest categories of offences were against property (30.7%), driving offences (26.5%) and offences against the person (21.5%).

It was felt important to investigate any sex differences in the type of offence committed. It seems that women were more likely to have

committed property offences (68.0% of the women sampled) than men (29.0% of the men sampled). This difference was found to be statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 6.57$ ;  $p < 0.025$ ;  $df = 1$ ). It appeared that men were more likely to have committed driving offences (27.4%) than women (8.0%).

It should be made clear that there were only small numbers of women in this sample and therefore it may not be possible to comment on any sex differences because any differences may be due to sample variation or chance factors.

## DISCUSSION

The material presented in this report is based on the self reports of the detainees interviewed. Distortion is a possible problem with such dependence on self reports. Caution in revealing information which could be used against a respondent's interests, embarrassment, or a simple desire for privacy could all result in inaccurate replies. Unmotivated inaccuracies due to failure of memory or understanding can also affect responses.

To the extent to which we can take these responses at face value, this study provides us with a profile of those attending PDC in NSW. Like their counterparts in full-time custody, the majority of detainees are Australian-born males, many of whom lack formal school qualifications. Over half of the detainees were currently employed. While data are unavailable on the proportion of the full-time prison population who were employed prior to their incarceration, it is likely that a higher proportion of periodic detainees were employed than the proportion of prisoners in full-time custody.

This study also highlighted areas of need. Over half of the detainees reported that they would like to learn a skill, trade or undertake an educational course. Half of the detainees thought that their being in prison was related to alcohol or other drugs.

Some detainees (11.3%) said that they would like to receive assistance or treatment regarding their drug or alcohol use while in periodic detention. That one out of every eight detainees reported that they were dependent on alcohol or other drugs highlights the issue of training for PDC staff. Such detainees, as well as detainees who do not consider that they are drug "dependent", may report to the PDC under the influence of drugs. Staff require training in withdrawal symptoms as well as strategies for managing such detainees. This study also identified the range of health problems or conditions which physically limit the detainees. Such physical conditions must pose problems when assigning the detainees to community work. One-third of the detainees expressed interest in information on how to avoid AIDS infection.

Furthermore, the responses of the detainees in this study indicate that there is scope for expanding mid-week periodic detention. Over one-third of those attending PDCs on weekends said that they would be interested in attending mid-week detention.

**Table 23: Most Serious Offence of the Periodic Detainees Interviewed**

	Men n (%)	Women n (%)	Total n (%)
Manslaughter	2	-	2
Assault	91	3	94
Sexual Assault	27	-	27
<b>TOTAL AGAINST PERSON</b>	<b>120 (21.9%)</b>	<b>3 (12.0%)</b>	<b>123 (21.5%)</b>
Armed Robbery	6	-	6
Assault and Rob	15	-	15
Blackmail	1	-	1
<b>TOTAL ROBBERY</b>	<b>22 (4.0%)</b>	<b>- (0.0%)</b>	<b>22 (3.8%)</b>
Break and Enter	44	3	47
Fraud	35	10	45
Receiving	11	-	11
Larceny Motor Vehicle	33	-	33
Other theft	31	3	34
Property damage	5	1	6
<b>TOTAL PROPERTY</b>	<b>159 (29.0%)</b>	<b>17 (68.0%)</b>	<b>176 (30.7%)</b>
Breach of CSO	14	-	14
Other offences against Justice Procedures	7	-	7
<b>TOTAL AGAINST JUSTICE PROCEDURES</b>	<b>21 (3.8%)</b>	<b>- (0.0%)</b>	<b>21 (3.7%)</b>
Possess drugs	9	1	10
Traffic drugs	46	2	48
Manufacture drugs	11	-	11
Other drug offences	5	-	5
<b>TOTAL DRUG OFFENCES</b>	<b>71 (13.0%)</b>	<b>3 (12.0%)</b>	<b>74 (12.9%)</b>
Drive under influence	77	2	79
Dangerous driving	28	-	28
Drive whilst disqualified	45	-	45
<b>TOTAL DRIVING</b>	<b>150 (27.4%)</b>	<b>2 (8.0%)</b>	<b>152 (26.5%)</b>
<b>Other offences</b>	<b>5 (0.9%)</b>	<b>- (0.0%)</b>	<b>5 (0.9%)</b>
<b>TOTAL ALL</b>	<b>548# (100%)</b>	<b>25 (100%)</b>	<b>573# (100%)</b>

# twenty-one missing cases

## APPENDIX

### Analysis of Responses to Selected Questions by P.D.C. Attended

**Table A.1**

P.D.C	No. Interviewed	% of Sample	% Aboriginal (1)	% mid-week (2)	% health problems (3)	% AIDS information (4)
Long Bay (Main & Annexe)	186	31.3	8.6	31.7	26.9	31.7
Long Bay (Mid-week)	40	6.7	7.5	N.A.	20.0	30.0
Emu Plains	74	12.5	4.1	44.6	16.2	17.6
Silverwater	40	6.7	7.5	25.0	22.5	35.0
Parramatta	26	4.4	3.8	30.8	26.9	26.9
Campbelltown	28	4.7	21.4	32.1	21.4	78.6
Tomago	75	12.6	0.0	60.0	25.3	37.3
St. Heliers	19	3.2	5.3	57.9	21.1	10.5
Windsor	81	13.6	1.2	28.4	38.3	49.4
Merinda	25	4.2	8.0	60.0	12.0	4.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>33.3</b>

(1) % who said they were either of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent

(2) % who said that, given the opportunity, they would attend a periodic detention program mid-week.

(3) % who said that they had health problems or conditions which physically limited them.

(4) % who said that they were interested in receiving information on how to avoid AIDS infection.

**Table A.2**

P.D.C	No. Interviewed	% prison drug related (1)	% dependent (2)	% help alcohol(3)	% help drug (4)	% want treatment (5)
Long Bay (Main & Annexe)	186	48.4	12.4	4.8	6.5	9.1
Long Bay (Mid-week)	40	57.5	10.0	5.0	5.0	7.5
Emu Plains	74	55.4	13.5	2.7	5.4	9.5
Silverwater	40	30.0	7.5	0.0	5.0	0.0
Parramatta	26	46.2	7.7	3.8	15.4	23.1
Campbelltown	28	42.9	21.4	3.6	7.1	7.1
Tomago	75	53.3	5.3	12.0	2.7	10.7
St. Heliers	19	42.1	0.0	0.0	5.3	5.3
Windsor	81	43.2	17.3	13.6	7.4	22.2
Merinda	25	72.0	32.0	0.0	20.0	20.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>11.3</b>

(1) % who said they thought their being in prison was related to alcohol or other drugs.

(2) % who reported that they would say that they were dependent on alcohol or other drugs.

(3) % who said that they needed help to overcome an alcohol abuse problem.

(4) % who said that they needed help to overcome a drug abuse problem.

(5) % who said that they would like to receive assistance or treatment while they were on periodic detention regarding their use of alcohol or other drugs.