

## Up to 2,000 serious offences committed by reoffending criminals every year

**Criminals are committing up to 2,000 murders, rapes and other serious offences every year just months after completing a punishment for a previous crime.**

By Tom Whitehead, Home Affairs Editor

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The number of serious offences being carried out by reoffenders every year has increased by more than half in a decade, figures from the Ministry of Justice show.

And three in four are committing a serious offence for the first time suggesting a growing trend of violence among those who go straight back to crime.

The figures also showed that almost half of all prisoners return to offending within a year of being released.

Last year it emerged that dangerous and violent criminals committed almost 200 serious further offences despite being under the supervision of the authorities.

The trend comes amid concerns that the planned reform of sentencing by Kenneth Clarke, the Justice Secretary, could see thousands of offenders receive softer sentences.

One victims campaigner called for longer jail terms and warned the criminal justice system is playing "Russian roulette with people's lives".

The MoJ annual reoffending statistics show the number of criminals who reoffend within a year of either leaving prison or completing a community punishment.

They show that 501 offences classed in the "most serious" categories were committed by those leaving jail or a community order in the first three months of 2009. If repeated throughout the year that would mean more than 2,000.

The category includes murder, rape, child sex abuse, wounding and serious assaults.

The figure was a 54 per cent increase on the 326 committed by those ending a sentence in the first quarter of 2000 and a seven per cent rise on the equivalent 470 in 2008.

One in four of the crimes related to serious sex and child sex offences and for 75 per cent of all the

offenders it was the first time they had been guilty of a serious offence.

Lyn Costello, from Mothers Against Murder and Aggression, said: "This shows that rehabilitation has to be looked at seriously and question whether we are releasing people who have not been rehabilitated.

"These figures mean 501 new victims of crime in this country and the fear is it is only going to get worse when we start sending fewer people to prison.

"We have to have sensible sentencing to ensure that when people are released they are not going to reoffend and that means longer sentences.

"We are playing Russian roulette with people's lives."

Overall, some 79,547 new offences were committed by criminals who finished their sentence in the first three months of 2009.

Of those who were released from prison, some 49 per cent went back to crime while, across all the offenders, some 39 per cent reoffend. Both figures were down slightly on the previous year.

A report in November found the majority of offenders never give up a life of crime despite being jailed or handed community penalties.

Three quarters of those convicted of an offence are caught for a further crime within a decade or less, the Ministry of Justice study showed.

A Ministry of Justice spokeswoman said: "These figures underline the need for a completely new approach to tackling reoffending.

"It is unacceptable that half of all crime is committed by people who have already been through the criminal justice system.

"The government is committed to more effective punishment and rehabilitation, so that the public is better protected from crime. This will enable us to break the cycle of crime and prison which creates new victims every day."