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# Learning, Motivation and Education among Female Prisoners in Norway and Belgium

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## Females in prison

- There are more female prisoners with mental health problems, drug related problems and social deprivation compared to the females in the general population (Stathopoulos, Quadra, Fileborn & Clark, 2012, Clark & Fileborn, 2011; Forsythe & Adams, 2009)
- Women in prison report an acutely more painful experience than their male counterparts, with many suffering complex emotional biographies and abuse pre-imprisonment (Jewkins et al 2019; Bucerius & Sandberg (2022)).

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# Female prisoners in Norway

- High prevalence of mental illnesses (Friestad and Skog Hansen 2004)
- In Amundsen's study (2009) among female prisoners (N=100), 8 of 10 self-reported to have been severely depressed before conviction, and 7 of 10 reported to have anxiety before convicted.
- Overall results from Cramer's (2014) study of 857 prisoners' mental illnesses (M=755 and F=102) revealed that there were no significant differences between male and female prisoners. Bukten et al (2020) female prisoners reported a similar score as male prisoners on Hopkins Symptom Check List measuring mental health symptoms.

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**“Hvorfor sone verre bare fordi vi er færre”  
(Why should serving be worse just because we are fewer)**

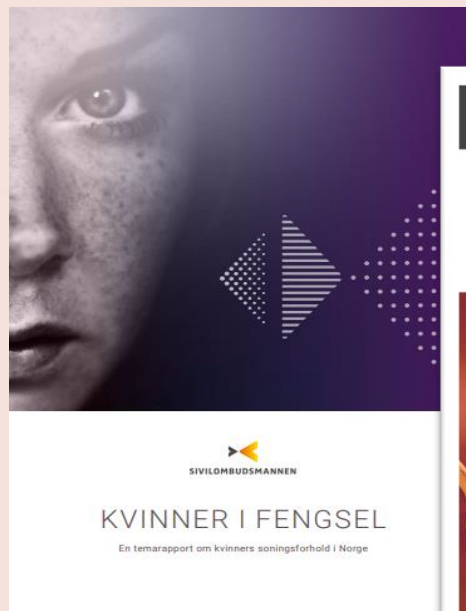


Dagsavisen, drawing by Siri Dokken

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# Female prisoners in Norway



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# Studies by Bergen Cognition and Learning Group including female samples



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## Female prisoners in Norway

- The female prison population in Norway in many ways resembles the male prison population – they share many features of their male counterparts when it comes to education level and self-reporting learning difficulties (Manger, Eikeland, Asbjørnsen 2013; Eikeland 2016).
- In a study from 2007 where a sample of 92 prisoners (females  $N=17$ ) were tested with reading and writing tests, the female prisoners mean score was higher on all the tests compared to the male prisoners, but the differences were not significant (Jones 2007).

## Level of education

Level of education	2009	2012	2015
Not completed any education	6.6	6.8	7.6
Mandatory education	57.6	53.4	44.3
Upper secondary education	23.6	27.3	31.6
University/college	12.3	12.3	16.5

*Note.* No significant differences between male and females

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**The project:  
Learning, Motivation and Education  
among Female Prisoners in Norway  
and Belgium (2019-2024)**

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# Project collaboration

## University of Bergen

### **Bergen Cognition and Learning Group, BCLG:**

Professor Lise Øen Jones  
Professor Wenche Helland  
Ass. professor Frøydis Morken



## University of Vrije, Brussels

### **Participation and Learning in Detention, PALD:**

Professor/post doc Dorien Brosens  
Professor Liesbeth de Donder  
Former Phd student Flore Crux  
Phd. student Silke Marynissen



# The study

## Inclusion criteria

- Female prisoners with Norwegian citizenship over 18 years, in Belgium age criteria
- The project reported to Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). Approval from Correctional Services in Norway and Belgium.
- Funding: University of Bergen and County Governor of Vestland

# The female population

## Norway

- 6.4 percent of the total prison population
- 4 (3) female prisons
- 2 (3) mixed prisons

## Belgium

- 4.9 percent of the total prison population
- 6 mixed prisons

# A mixed method study

WP1 Survey data	WP2 Individual testing	WP 3 Focus groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Questionnaire</li><li>▪ Norway n= 59</li><li>▪ Belgium n= 40/46</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Norway n=9</li><li>▪ Planned for 30</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Norway planned for 3 groups</li><li>▪ Belgium 2 groups completed (n= 12)</li></ul>

- Overall sample N = 99 (105)

# The questionnaire

- Demographic variables (age, sentence, education)
- Self-reporting of learning challenges ADHD self-report scale (WHO)
- Self-reported diagnoses (ADHD, DLD/SLI)
- Reading skills (Adult Reading Questionnaire)
- **Language (La Trobe)\***
- Motivation scale
- Academic Self-Efficacy
- Barriers to education
- **Mental health (HSCL-10)**
- **Sleep disorders (BIS)**

\* Only in Norway

Forskergruppen for kognisjon og læring, Universitetet i Bergen  
**Læring, motivasjon og utdanning blant kvinnelige innsatte**

Du skal **ikke** skrive navnet ditt på spørreskjemaet  
Skriv deltakernummer her: \_\_\_\_\_

**Noen spørsmål om hvem du er:**

1. *Hva er din alder? (Sett kryss.)*  
 18-24     25-34     35-44     Over 44

2. *Hva er ditt fengselsgrunnlag?*  
 Dom, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Forvaring, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Bot, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Varetekt, for dom, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Varetekt, har anket dom, \_\_\_\_\_

**Hvis du er i varetekt for dom, gå da direkte til spørsmål 5.**

3. *Hvor lang dom har du nå? (Sett kryss.)*  
 3 måneder eller kortere, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 3, til og med 6 måneder, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 6 måneder, til og med 1 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 1, til og med 2 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 2, til og med 3 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 3, til og med 4 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 4, til og med 5 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 5, til og med 6 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 6, til og med 7 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 7, til og med 8 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 8, til og med 9 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 9, til og med 10 år, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Mer enn 10 år, \_\_\_\_\_

4. *Har du tidligere vært domfelt?*  
 Nei, aldri, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Ja, 1-2 ganger, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Ja, 3 eller flere ganger, \_\_\_\_\_

**Utdanning og arbeid**

5. *Hva er den høyeste utdanning du har fullført? (OE Fagbrev og så høyt i lære som er i videregående opplæring. Fagskole er yrkesrettet opplæring som bygger på videregående opplæring.) (Sett kryss.)*  
 Jeg har ikke fullført noen utdanning, \_\_\_\_\_   
 10-årig grunnskole eller kortere, \_\_\_\_\_   
 1 år videregående opplæring, \_\_\_\_\_   
 2 år videregående opplæring, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Har fullført videregående opplæring, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Fagskoleutdanning, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Enkeltfag på universitet eller høyskole, \_\_\_\_\_   
 Gradutdanning på universitet eller høyskole, \_\_\_\_\_

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# Findings

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## Age groups

	N	Percent
18-24	11	11.2
25-34	31	31.6
35-44	30	30.6
44 and older	26	26.5
Total	98	100

*Note.* Missing n=1 Norway n= 59  
and Belgium n=40



## Previously convicted

	N	Percent
No, never	42	47.7
Yes, 1-2 times	34	38.6
Yes 3 or more	12	13.6
Total	88	100

*Note.* Missing 10

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## Highest completed education level

	N	B	N %	B %
Not completed upper secondary	36	17	62,0	42,5
Completed upper secondary incl vocational	11	16	19.0	40.0
Higher education (single subject or degree)	11	7	19.0	17.5

Note. Norway= n=59 Belgium n=40

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## Hopkins Symptom Check List-10 (HSCL-10)

- The Hopkins Symptom Checklist is a measure of psychological distress, with subscales for anxiety and depression.

- In this study, we used the HSCL-10, which has been shown to exhibit good psychometric properties for use in both research and clinical settings (Strand et al., 2003).

- HSCL consists of 10 items, ranging from Not at all (=1) to Extremely (5). The scores are summed and divided by 10. In a Norwegian sample of 973 individuals, Strand et al. (2003) found a mean score of 1.41. The cut-off point for psychological distress is 1.75 (Strand et al., 2003).

Participants were asked to response to the following items according to their experience during the previous week:

1. Suddenly scared for no reason
2. Feeling fearful
3. Faintness, dizziness, or weakness
4. Feeling tense or keyed up
5. Blaming yourself for things
6. Difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep
7. Feeling blue
8. Feeling of worthlessness
9. Feeling everything is an effort
10. Feeling hopeless about future

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# HSCl-10

N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Sd.
n = 93	1.00	3.90	<b>2.30</b>	0.73

Note. Missing n = 6

- Number of participants over cut off score (1.85) n = 65 with a mean score of 2.68.
- Bukten et al's study (2020): Mean score 2.10 (sd. 0.8) Men 1.90 (0.8)

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# Age and mental health

	Sum score HSCL-10	
Age group	Mean	Sd.
18-35	2.49	(0.72)
35 +	2.18	(1.24)

Note. Sign  $p < .05$

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# Way Ahead

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# Way Ahead

## Planned papers

- Oral Language Problems in Norwegian Female Prisoners (Helland et al 2022)
- Language, literacy and mental health, Norwegian sample (under review)
- Prevalence of mental health and insomnia, samples from Norway and Belgium (in preparation)
  
- **Further data collection in Norway 2023-2024?**
  - New questionnaires
  - Individual testing
  - Focus groups

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## More information



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