

## Press Releases

LCQ11: Self harm cases by inmates

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Following is a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Lai Tung-kwok, to a question by the Hon Dennis Kwok in the Legislative Council today (December 19):

Question:

The media has recently reported that in the past two years, there were more than a hundred cases of inmates inflicting harm on themselves, which resulted in quite a number of deaths. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(a) of the respective numbers of inmates who inflicted harm on themselves and died as a result in the past three years;

(b) whether the authorities have conducted any investigation into the causes for inmates inflicting harm on themselves; if they have, of a breakdown of such cases in the past three years by the cause; if not, the reasons for that; and

(c) of the details of the authorities' measures to prevent inmates (especially persons in solitary confinement) from inflicting harm on themselves?

Reply:

President,

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) is committed to providing a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy environment for persons in custody. Correctional services staff attach great importance to ensuring the safety of inmates, including preventing their self harm behaviour.

(a) The number of self harm cases by inmates and suicidal death in the past three years is as follows:

	Number of cases		Total
	Self harm (non-fatal)	Self harm (fatal)	
2010	86	4	90
2011	95	0	95
2012 (up to mid-December)	77	2	79

(b) CSD is very concerned about all self harm cases of inmates. Whenever there are such cases, correctional services staff and clinical psychologists will counsel the inmate concerned appropriately, including investigating into and understanding the causes for such self harm behaviour. All fatal cases will be reported to the Police. The Coroner's Court will subsequently conduct an inquest into the cause of death of the inmate concerned. CSD would study the findings and judgement of the Coroner's Court and follow up as appropriate.

Causes for inmates inflicting harm on themselves are usually very complicated due to the variation in their background, offence committed and sentence. As such, CSD cannot categorise the cause of each case or provide any statistics. In general, the major causes for these self harm cases include family problems,

emotional problems, health issues, as well as the residual effects of drug abuse, etc.

(c) CSD has been taking all practicable measures to prevent inmates from inflicting harm on themselves.

CSD staff stay highly vigilant while on duty and closely monitor the behaviour of inmates, particularly those who have recently been admitted to correctional institutions, so as to detect as early as possible whether they have any self harm tendency (eg whether they feel depressed, alienate themselves and mutter to themselves). CSD staff will refer those inmates who are identified to have a risk of harming themselves to clinical psychologists for assessment and counselling. Medical officers also conduct daily check of inmates in separate confinement. Those inmates are also visited by clinical psychologists and chaplains.

On staff training, CSD regularly provides in-service training for frontline officers on how to prevent inmates from inflicting harm on themselves. Drills are also conducted from time to time to ensure that officers can act promptly and appropriately to save inmates who harm themselves.

In respect of cell design, many facilities (such as toilets, mirrors, fire sprinklers and washing basins) in correctional institutions are specifically designed to prevent inmates from using any broken parts of such facilities to harm themselves or using such facilities as supporting points to hang themselves, thereby reducing the possibility of inmates harming themselves.

In addition, CSD provides psychological counselling services and organises rehabilitation activities for inmates (such as group activities or talks). The department also helps them develop positive life values through publicity items such as posters and pamphlets, and conducts publicity and public education campaigns in conjunction with non-government organisations to encourage inmates' relatives and friends to show their care and support, with a view to preventing the self harm behaviour of inmates.

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