# Scotland faces backlash over prisoners’ access to violent and explicit films



In an alarming revelation, Scotland's penitentiary system has drawn scrutiny for allowing inmates at HMP Barlinnie to access a wide array of X-rated films and television shows featuring themes of extreme violence, drug use, and sexual content. Despite an ongoing crisis of violence within the prison community, the facility, known for housing some of Scotland’s most hardened criminals, offers a substantial library of films, including notorious titles such as *Saw*, *Silence of the Lambs*, and the American television series *Dexter*, which chronicles a forensic officer's double life as a serial killer.

Documents obtained under freedom of information laws unveil that inmates have access to more than 4,100 DVDs and 470 computer games. This library includes graphic content that raises questions about its suitability in a rehabilitative environment. Movies depicting real-life child killers, such as Fred and Rose West and Myra Hindley, along with highly sexualised films including *Fifty Shades of Grey*, are readily available to those serving sentences for serious crimes. Prison officers have voiced their concerns, urging the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) to reassess these policies, especially in light of reports indicating a staggering average of over 250 assaults on prison staff annually over the past decade.

The Scottish Conservative Party has taken a firm stance, with Justice spokesman Liam Kerr criticising the presence of such material within the prison system. He lamented that "ordinary Scots will be appalled," underlining that similar content has been banned in prisons across England and Wales since 2013. Kerr demanded that the Scottish Government intervene to eliminate access to violent and sexually explicit material from the prison library, arguing that it undermines rehabilitation efforts and could exacerbate the already tense atmosphere within the facility.

The SPS has defended their policies, stating that access to DVDs is a privilege determined at the discretion of individual prison governors. This justification, however, has not alleviated concerns about the potential impact of such content on inmates’ behaviour, particularly those striving to overcome substance abuse issues. Given the prevalence of drug-related narratives in many of these films, critics argue that access to such material contradicts any rehabilitation agenda.

This troubling trend isn't isolated to Barlinnie. Across Scotland, similar patterns have emerged, with reports detailing similar access to violent films in other institutions like HMP Grampian. Inmates there have been able to choose from a diverse selection of films, including *Cocaine Bear*, a movie that satirically depicts a bear on a cocaine-fuelled rampage. This suggests a broader cultural acceptance within Scottish prisons of entertaining narratives that glorify violence and criminal behaviour, raising profound ethical questions about what content is deemed appropriate for rehabilitation.

Moreover, past incidents in various Scottish prisons have exposed a willingness to permit access to sexually explicit materials, as seen at HMP Glenochil, where convicted sex offenders were allowed to order pornography through the prison canteen. This has drawn criticism from advocacy groups, who warn that such liberties could undermine the rehabilitation of offenders and potentially endanger the welfare of other inmates and staff.

As debates surrounding this issue intensify, the SPS has been urged to strike a balance between providing entertainment and maintaining a secure environment conducive to rehabilitation. Critics argue that without a thorough review and possible amendment of current policies, the consequences of allowing access to graphically violent and sexually explicit material will continue to reverberate throughout the Scottish prison system, affecting not just prison dynamics, but the broader societal implications of crime and rehabilitation.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768035/Criminals-allowed-watch-X-rated-violent-films-comfort-jail-cells.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scottish-prison-inmates-have-access-to-violent-films-1557515)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768035/Criminals-allowed-watch-X-rated-violent-films-comfort-jail-cells.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/crime-courts/6124951/cocaine-bear-hmp-grampian/), [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-prisons-offering-library-of-violent-films-1557579)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/convicted-sex-offenders-allowed-pornography-in-hmp-glenochil-one-scottish-prison-a6988996.html), [[5]](https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/magilligan-prisoners-allowed-to-watch-films-featuring-rape-murder-torture-and-robberies/34961378.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-prisons-offering-library-of-violent-films-1557579), [[7]](https://www.sps.gov.uk/prisons/barlinnie)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14768035/Criminals-allowed-watch-X-rated-violent-films-comfort-jail-cells.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/scottish-prison-inmates-have-access-to-violent-films-1557515> - In October 2013, it was revealed that Scottish prisoners had access to a vast library of violent films and video games. Inmates, including those convicted of serious crimes, could choose from over 4,100 DVDs and 470 computer games across the Scottish prison system. Titles included violent horror movies like 'Kill Bill 2' and documentaries on notorious criminals such as Dennis Nilsen and Fred and Rose West. The Scottish Prison Service stated that access to these materials was a privilege, not a right, and was at the discretion of the prison governor.
3. <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/crime-courts/6124951/cocaine-bear-hmp-grampian/> - In 2023, it was reported that prisoners at HMP Grampian had access to a diverse range of media, including films featuring extreme violence and drug use. The prison library's most loaned items included the film 'Cocaine Bear', which depicts a bear ingesting a large quantity of cocaine and going on a violent rampage. Other popular titles among inmates were superhero films like 'Black Panther: Wakanda Forever' and crime dramas such as 'Gangs of London'. The library also offered a mix of educational and entertainment materials.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/convicted-sex-offenders-allowed-pornography-in-hmp-glenochil-one-scottish-prison-a6988996.html> - In 2016, it was reported that convicted sex offenders at HMP Glenochil were permitted to access pornography. The decision was made by the prison's governor in response to prisoner requests. The Scottish Prison Service stated that the magazines were not illegal to purchase and that inmates could order them through the prison's canteen service. However, the move faced criticism from sexual violence charities, which expressed concern that such material could undermine rehabilitation efforts.
5. <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/magilligan-prisoners-allowed-to-watch-films-featuring-rape-murder-torture-and-robberies/34961378.html> - In 2016, it was revealed that inmates at Magilligan Prison in Northern Ireland had access to films depicting graphic violence and explicit content. DVDs available to prisoners included titles like 'Inglourious Basterds', 'Saw III', and 'Love and Other Drugs'. The Justice Department stated that the general rule at Magilligan Prison was that if a DVD could be purchased in a shop or online, prisoners could also purchase it. However, the availability of such material raised concerns about its appropriateness in a correctional setting.
6. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-prisons-offering-library-of-violent-films-1557579> - In October 2013, it was reported that Scottish prisons provided inmates with access to a vast collection of violent films and video games. The library included over 4,100 DVDs and 470 computer games, featuring titles such as 'Grand Theft Auto IV' and 'Snatch'. The Scottish Prison Service stated that access to these materials was a privilege, not a right, and was at the discretion of the prison governor. The availability of such content sparked debate about its role in rehabilitation and the appropriateness of its presence in prisons.
7. <https://www.sps.gov.uk/prisons/barlinnie> - HMP Barlinnie, located in Glasgow, Scotland, is the largest prison in the country, housing male prisoners of all sentence lengths. The prison has faced criticism for its overcrowded conditions and outdated facilities. In April 2025, inspectors described the prison as being in a 'wretchedly poor state' and operating at 30% over capacity. Plans for a replacement facility, HMP Glasgow, have been announced, but the development is not expected to open until 2028. The Scottish Prison Service continues to manage the facility, addressing challenges related to overcrowding and infrastructure.