

Substance use among prisoners: An attempt to conduct a complete survey in Wittlich prison / Rhineland-Palatinate

Franziska Schneider

Institut für Therapieforschung, Munich, Germany

Objectives: Health care in prison and the accompanied issue of drug use amongst inmates has not yet been given much consideration in scientific research in Germany. Most available information on prevalence rates and other indicators related to drug use and substance use disorders in intramural settings are frequently outdated. A comparison between Germany and other European countries is therefore not possible at the moment. Prevention and offers of assistance are often not tied to the specific needs of the prison population because we know too little about current drug use patterns and their changes. There are observable changes in drug use outside the prison setting which may require adjustment of help measurements. Currently it is not clear if those changes are similar in prisons – particular indications, like the use of synthetic cannabinoids, seem to suggest that assumption. For future research it is very important to learn more about the developing drug use patterns and the associated problems. This is the only possibility to figure out which problems the inmates actually have at the moment and which consequences regarding help measurements have to follow out of this.

Methodology: A two-sided questionnaire was handed out to every inmate who wanted to participate voluntarily and only self-reporting was included. The questionnaire was divided into four different topics: Legal drugs, illegal drugs, risk behavior and knowledge about offers of assistance and repression within the prison. Information on lifetime-prevalence of alcohol, nicotine and drug use and during the actual imprisonment were collected as well as information on consumption patterns. The survey also included questions about injecting drug use. Furthermore the participants were asked about their utilization of help offers in- and outside prison.

Results: 193 (41,45 %) of 468 inmates participated in the survey. Not participating might have had different reasons like distrust and fear of sanctions. Only two inmates reported the consumption of alcohol in Wittlich prison, whereas 82,4 % (n=159) proclaimed being smokers. 19,7 % (n=38) stated that they already used illegal drugs during their imprisonment, lifetime-prevalence rate of any illegal drug use was 64,2 % (n=124). 4,7 % (n=9) of the imprisoned stated that they already shared injecting equipment before being imprisoned. 1,6 % (n=3) affirmed sharing injecting equipment also in prison. 54,9 % (n=106) of the participants already had contact with counseling services regarding their alcohol- or drug-related problems. Even more (59,6 % (n=115) reported contact to respective offers during their actual imprisonment.

Conclusions: Outcomes show that lifetime-prevalence of every called up legal and illegal drug is higher among inmates of Wittlich than in the male adult population in Germany. It seems to be reasonable to provide and expand offerings concerning problems with the use of legal and illegal substances. Overall it needs to be said that a lot of prisoners are already tied to help offers in the prison of Wittlich. It seems to be that those offerings are well accepted.

Keywords: Drug-use in Prison, Lifetime-prevalence of substance-use in prisoners, Health care in prison

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