

The rates of different crimes and the use of illicit substances before and during imprisonment among prisoners

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: There is a strong association between the use of substances and criminal behaviour. The use of illicit substances is not only a criminal act, but it also predisposes a person to other crimes. As the use of illicit substances is quite common among criminals, similarly the rate of crimes is also high among substance users.

Objectives: To document the rates of different crimes among prisoners and the rates of the use of different substances among them before and during imprisonment.

Materials & Methods: In this observational study, 327 sample size was achieved through systematic probability sampling technique from central prison Haripur from November to December 2022. Data were analyzed for descriptive statistics through SPSS 24; rates and percentages were calculated for categorical variables, while the mean and standard deviation were calculated for continuous variables.

Results: The prisoners were almost all males (99.1%) with only 0.9% females. The mean age of the prisoners was 38.64 ± 12.57 years. The most common crime was murder (44.5%). The lifetime rate of the use of tobacco before imprisonment was 63.3% while it increased up to 67.3% during imprisonment. Almost 32.75% reported the use of illicit substances before imprisonment while 23.5% were still using illicit substances inside the prison.

Conclusion: Imprisonment does not cessate the habit of substance use by prisoners, it merely alters the pattern and magnitude of the problem, in relation to ease of access of illicit substances.

Keywords: Substance-Related Disorders; Tobacco Use Disorder; Marijuana Abuse; Prisons.

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INTRODUCTION

Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) include both substance use disorders and the Substance Induced Disorder due to use of psychoactive substances resulting into the impairment of physical and mental health or a behaviour leading to harm to the health of others.¹ In 2020, 36.7% males while 7.8% females and 22.3% of the global population had used tobacco. The prevalence of tobacco use peaks at the age of 45-54 years for males, and 55-64 years for females. Globally, the rates of tobacco use are highest in the South-East Asia region (almost 50% in 2000 and 29% in 2020).² In a study the prevalence of tobacco use in Pakistan was reported to be 13.4%.³ The lifetime prevalence of the use of substance in general population in different countries varies from 16% to 42%.⁴ According to a US national survey, the lifetime prevalence of drug use disorder is 9.9%.⁵ As per United Nations Office on Drugs & Crime (UNODC) report 2022,⁶ 5.5% of the global population aged 15-64 years had used major drugs in the past year. The worldwide annual prevalence of the use of cannabis was 4.12%, opioids 1.21%, cocaine 0.42%, stimulants 0.68%, and Ecstasy 0.39%.⁶ SUDs are also common among those presenting with another psychiatric disorder.⁷

The prevalence of crimes is highly variable among different studies and countries because much criminal behaviour goes unrecorded by the law enforcement agencies. In western countries, 80% indictable offences are committed by males younger than 21 years. Property offence is the most common crime.⁸ As per UNODC report,⁶ the rate of intentional homicide in Pakistan and India are 3.84 and 2.95 per 100000 respectively. In southern Asia, 47.8 persons per 100000 population were held in prisons in 2019.⁶

There is a strong association between the use of substances and criminal behaviour. Therefore, substance use is more prevalent among prisoners.⁸ In a study conducted in Ethiopia on prisoners, the lifetime rates of substance use was 69%, the one year rate was 55.9% and the 30-days rate was 50.2%; out of these, 36.2% were using alcohol and 3.6% were using cannabis.⁹ The estimated lifetime prevalence of the use of illicit drugs for younger prisoners (20 - 49 years) was 50.0%, and for older

prisoners (50 - 75 years) it was 24.2%. Among the younger prisoners, 10.0% were using cannabis currently while 4.7% were using other illicit substances. Among older prisoners, 3.2% were using cannabis currently while 0.5% were using other illicit substances.⁹ According to a study the lifetime prevalence of the use of substances among prisoners in Karachi was 91.7%,¹⁰ while in central prison Peshawar it was 72.8%, out of which 98.70% were using tobacco while 38.46% were using cannabis. Among those who are using substances in prison, 90.1% had started the use before imprisonment.¹¹

As no such study has been conducted on this topic in the recent past in this part of the world, therefore our study will provide latest statistics regarding the rates of the use of substances and different types of crimes among the prisoners.

MATERIALS & METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted in Central prison Haripur from November 2022 to December 2022, after taking approval from the Head of the institution and ethical review board. A 327 sample size was achieved through systematic probability sampling technique by a self-prepared questionnaire from the prisoners whether convicted or still under trial after taking informed consent. For those who had been accused of more than one crime, only the most serious crime was recorded for this study. Crimes were grouped into eleven i.e. Murder,

Quarrel/Beating, Use of Substances, Drug trafficking, Stealing, Robbery, Fraud, Kidnapping, Adultery, Terrorism and Others. Substances of Use were grouped into two i.e. Use of tobacco, and Use of Substances other than tobacco. Substances other than tobacco were grouped into Cannabis, Opioids, Alcohol, Cocaine, other Stimulants, Sedative Hypnotics, and others. The rates and percentage for the categorical variables were calculated, while mean and standard deviation for the continuous variables were calculated through SPSS version 24.

RESULTS

Out of 327, 99.1% were males, while 0.9% were females; 60.1% were married and 39.9% were single. Those who were educated at least up to the primary level were 61.6%. The mean age was 38.64 ± 12.57 years. Those accused of murder were 44.8%; Quarrel and Beating, 4.6%; Use of Substances, 8%; Drugs traffickings, 19.3%; Stealing, 2.5%; Robbery, 1.2%; Fraud, 0.9%; Kidnapping, 0.9%; Adultery, 3.7%; Terrorism, 11.3% and other crimes, 1.8%. The lifetime rate of the Use of Substance before imprisonment was 64.5% while during imprisonment it was 68.5%, indicating a 4.0% increase in the rate of Substance Use during imprisonment. The rates of different groups of substances before and during imprisonment are given in Table 1. Those who started the use of substance before imprisonment were 92.5% while 7.5% started the use of substance inside prison.

Table 1: The rates of the use of the different groups of substances before and during imprisonment (n= 327).

#	Substance Abuse	Before imprisonment	During imprisonment	Change (%)
		Rates (%)	Rates (%)	
1	Use of any substance	211 (64.5)	224 (68.5)	4.00↑
2	Tobacco	207 (63.3)	224 (67.3)	4.00↑
	i Snuff	152 (46.5)	173 (52.9)	6.40↑
	ii Cigarette	148 (45.45)	143 (43.7)	1.75↓
3	Substance other than tobacco	107 (32.7)	77 (23.5)	9.20↓
	i Cannabis	82 (25.1)	44 (13.5)	11.60↓
	ii Opioids	56 (17.1)	47 (14.4)	2.70↓
	iii Other stimulants	16 (4.9)	09 (2.8)	2.10↓
	iv Sedative hypnotics	13 (4.0)	13 (4.0)	0.00↔
	v Alcohol	13 (4.0)	0 (0.00)	4.00↓
	vi Cocaine	03 (0.9)	0 (0.00)	0.90↓
	vii Others	07 (2.1)	04 (1.2)	0.90↓

DISCUSSION

It is an established fact that the Substance Use increases the risk of criminal acts and vice versa. Hence, the rate of the use of substances among the prisoners was reported as very high.⁸ In our study the lifetime rate of the use of the substance before imprisonment was 64.5% and it increased to 68.5% during imprisonment. This rate is higher than general population but lower than what was reported by Jamal M et al.¹⁰ Generally, there is a 4% increase in the rate of those who are using tobacco while 9.20% decrease in the rates of those who are using substances other than tobacco (illicit substances) inside the prison. The possible reason is that it is quite difficult to find illicit substances while tobacco is easily available inside the prison. So, the tobacco may be used by some prisoners as a compensation for the other illicit substances. One of the important findings in our study is that among illicit substances, only those are used inside prison that are available in solid or powder form e.g. Cannabis, Heroin, Methamphetamine (Ice) etc., while the rate of the use of alcohol

or other substances available in liquid form is zero inside prison. This finding is in contradiction to an earlier study.⁹ The possible explanation for this fact is that it is difficult to hide and transport substances in liquid form while crossing through the security gates of the prison.

Contrary to earlier studies conducted in the community where the rate of property offense is high,^{6,8,9} the rate of murder (44.8%) is quite high in our study as compared to other crimes. The possible reason of this finding is that those who have committed crimes other than murder are released on bail easily or imprisoned for short time as a punishment as compared to murderers.

CONCLUSION

The rate of the use of substances before and during imprisonment among prisoners is high as compared to general population. During imprisonment there is an increase in the rates of those who use tobacco while there is a decrease in the rates of those

who are using illicit substances, in relation to ease of access of illicit substances.

LIMITATIONS

As prisoners were asked retrospectively about the use of substances in the past outside prison, so recall bias may be there. Moreover, some prisoners may not have disclosed information correctly particularly about the use of illicit substances outside as well as inside the prison due to the fear of the punishment or because they were facing trial against the use of the illicit substances.

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RECOMMENDATION

Since rate of the use of substances among the prisoners is quite high, the government should establish Drug Addiction Treatment Centres inside each prison for the purpose of detoxification and rehabilitation for these addicts.

Proper modern body screening instruments should be installed in the gates of all the prisons to limit the transport of illicit substances inside the prison.