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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Alcohol and drug use as factors associated with mental disorders among the incarcerated population in Spain[☆]

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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Objective: Previous research supports the relationship between the use of alcohol and other drugs and mental disorders. The aim of this study was to analyse the association between drug and alcohol use prior to incarceration and the current prevalence of mental disorders among the incarcerated population in Spain.

Material and methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted, including to 2709 incarcerated subjects (2484 males and 225 females) from a total of 8 prisons. A self-administered anonymous and voluntary questionnaire was used. The prevalence of psychoactive substance use prior to imprisonment and the current prevalence of mental disorders was calculated. The association between the two variables was analysed with logistic regression for both genders.

Results: Alcohol was the most consumed substance in the 6 months prior to detention for both men and women (68.5 and 48.9%, respectively) followed by cannabis (50.9 and 38.2%, respectively). The prevalence of mental disorders in prison was statically significant for men and women (24.9 and 34.2%, respectively). Most of the psychoactive substances analysed involve a risk factor for current mental disorder, especially as regards the use of psychotropic drugs (OR: 2.04, 95% CI: 1.54–2.71) and cannabis (OR: 1.81, 95% CI: 1.47–2.24).

Discussion: We found an association between alcohol and drug use and the current prevalence of mental disorders among the incarcerated population sample. Furthermore, it is recommended to develop effective protocols for treatment and rehabilitation programmes in prison. These should suit inmates' history of drug and alcohol use to improve mental health strategies.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

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Consumo de alcohol y drogas como factores asociados a los trastornos mentales entre la población penitenciaria de España

Resumen

Fundamentos: Investigaciones previas apoyan la relación entre consumo de alcohol y otras drogas y trastornos mentales. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar la asociación entre consumo de alcohol y otras drogas previo al internamiento en prisión y la prevalencia actual de trastornos mentales entre la población penitenciaria de España.

Material y métodos: Se realizó un estudio transversal sobre 2.709 personas privadas de libertad (2.484 hombres y 225 mujeres) distribuidos en 8 centros penitenciarios. Se utilizó una encuesta autoadministrada anónima y voluntaria. Se calculó la prevalencia de consumo de sustancias psicoactivas previamente a prisión y la prevalencia actual de trastornos mentales. La asociación entre ambas variables se analizó con regresiones logísticas para ambos géneros.

Resultados: El alcohol fue la sustancia más consumida en los 6 meses previos al internamiento tanto para los hombres como en las mujeres (68,5 y 48,9%) seguido del cannabis (50,9 y 38,2%). La prevalencia de trastornos mentales en prisión fue estadísticamente significativa para los hombres y mujeres (24,9 y 34,2%, respectivamente). El consumo de la mayoría de las sustancias psicoactivas analizadas supuso un factor de riesgo para tener actualmente algún trastorno mental, con especial relevancia del consumo de psicotrópicos (OR: 2,04 IC95%:1,54-2,71) y cannabis (OR: 1,81 IC95%:1,47-2,24).

Discusión: Se encontró una asociación entre consumo de alcohol y drogas y la prevalencia actual de trastornos mentales entre la población penitenciaria estudiada. Asimismo se recomienda desarrollar programas de tratamiento y rehabilitación en prisión adecuados a las historias previas de consumo para mejorar las estrategias de salud mental.

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Introduction

The use of alcohol and other drugs among the prison population prior to imprisonment is an international problem, with a high prevalence of use being found in prior research projects conducted in the United States,¹ South America,² Europe³ and Asia⁴ with prevalences that range approximately from 20% to 80%. In a prior meta-analysis⁵ analysing a total of 30 studies, the prevalence of alcohol abuse was 18–30% and 10–24% among men and women, respectively, and 10–48% and 30–60%, respectively, at the time of imprisonment.

According to data provided by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction,³ approximately 60% of European inmates had a drug abuse problem at some point in their life prior to their imprisonment, highlighting cannabis with prevalences ranging from 12% to 70% depending on the country considered. In addition, occasionally the use and/or abuse of drugs continues during the fulfilment of the prison sentence.⁶

In Spain, the Survey on Health and Drug Use among Inmates in Penitentiary Institutions⁷ highlights alcohol use as the predominant substance in the month prior to imprisonment with approximately 65%, followed by cannabis (40%), and cocaine in powder and base form (27% and 18%, respectively).

A multitude of previous international investigations show a high prevalence of mental disorders in prison,^{8–10} being

higher than those found in the general population.¹¹ In one meta-analysis⁸ conducted in prisons of 24 countries and more than 33,500 inmates, a general prevalence for depression of 10.2% was estimated among men and 14.1% among women. Regarding the characteristics of the mental disorders, most research projects agree that anxiety and depression disorders are the most common for both sexes,^{11–13} with prevalences ranging from 20% to 60% among men and 40% to 60% among women. In Spain, in the report from the Ministry of the Interior¹⁴ from the year 2006, it was estimated that the prevalence of mental disorders within Spanish prisons was approximately 46%. In another investigation in Spain¹⁵ on 707 inmates, it was observed that the prevalence of psychiatric pathology is higher in the penitentiary population than in the general population; the data reveal that approximately 40% have some disorder on Axis I in the DSM-IV.

The penitentiary population shows a high comorbidity between drug use disorders and various mental disorders.^{9,16} In an investigation conducted among female inmates in the United States,¹⁶ statistically significant associations were found between a mental disorder (OR: 2.4), severe depressions (OR: 2.7) and schizophrenia (OR: 2.4) with the abuse of alcohol and other drugs prior to prison. These data are in line with research projects conducted in prisons in France,¹⁷ Italy¹⁸ or Spain.¹⁹

Based on the previous literature analysed, we start from the hypothesis that inmates with a history of alcohol and

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