

Prevalence of substance use disorders among prisoners in Al-Diwania governorate, Iraq

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Summary:

Background: Substance use disorders (SUDs) are among the common psychiatric disorders and constitute a major public health concern. Iraqi's were exposed to widespread violence and wars in the last decades. High prevalence of alcohol and substance use was reported recently in Baghdad. Research literature documented the association of SUDs with exposure to trauma events e.g. wars, terrorist attacks and natural disaster. Published articles on SUDs among prisoners in Iraq are scarce. Therefore, this work was carried out to report on SUDs among prisoners in Al-Diwania governorate and its relation to antisocial activity.

Methods: A total of 1200 prisoners in Al-Diwania civilian prison were included in the study during the period from 2nd January to 2nd May 2010. A questionnaire using ICD₁₀ characteristics of SUDs was used. The requested data in addition to characteristics of SUDs were demographic data and type of crime. In order to study the association of SUDs with criminal act, a control group (150 prisoners out of 1050) was selected randomly from the prisoners without SUDs.

Results: The study revealed a rate of (12.5%) of SUDs. The peak age of abuse was at age 31 – 35 years. More than half of the sample which was composed of male prisoners was in age 25 to 35 years. Fifty three (35.3%) of the abusers were illiterate, and 70 (46.7%) finished the primary school. Only 2 of the abusers (1.3%) had higher education. Thirty (20%) of the abusers were unemployed, 100 (66.67%) were self-employed and only 18 (12%) were employed. Criminal act was significantly associated with SUDs.

Conclusion: High rate of SUDs was revealed among prisoners. SUDs were significantly associated with criminal behavior.

Keywords: substance abuse, criminal act, prisoners, Al-Diwania, Iraq

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Introduction:

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are among the common psychiatric disorders and constitute a major public health concern. Recent epidemiological surveys have reported lifetime prevalence of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR) of any substance abuse or dependence between 10-20% in general population (1-3). Research literature (4, 5) documented the association of SUDs with exposure to trauma events e.g. wars, terrorist attacks and natural disaster. Iraqi's were exposed to widespread violence and wars in the last decades (6, 7). Data on the prevalence of anxiety, mood, behavioral and substance disorders were introduced by Iraqi Mental Health Survey (IMHS) (8). High prevalence of alcohol and substance use was reported recently in Baghdad, 17.9% and 7.02% (9), respectively. Published articles on SUDs among prisoners in Iraq are scarce. Therefore, this work was carried out to report on SUDs among prisoners in Al-Diwania governorate and its relation to antisocial activity.

Materials and methods:

A total of 1200 prisoners in Al-Diwania governorate were included in the study. They were asked whether they had used substances or not and those

claiming to have used substances were (182) whom were interviewed by the researcher using International Classification of Diseases (ICD₁₀) questionnaire of SUDs. The interview was done once weekly with an average of (9) prisoners for each one. The questionnaire was translated to Arabic language by experts in Arabic and English languages. Each prisoner was interviewed and a questionnaire was filled in for him. The requested data in addition to characteristics of SUDs were demographic data and type of crime. In order to study the association of SUDs with criminal act, a control group (150 prisoners) was selected. The selection was done randomly from the prisoners without SUDs by the use of systematic sample choosing every 5th one. Inclusion criteria: 1-all those substances that cause dependency 2- Population who have the will to participate. Exclusion criteria: 1-all the prisoners who had psychiatric disorders and on psychotropic medications. 2-those who were so seriously ill or in need of medical care. 3-those who refused to take part. Chi square was used to examine the association of criminal act with SUDs. P value 0.05 was considered as significant.

Results:

The revealed rate of SUDs was (12.5%). The age distribution of substance abusers is shown in Fig.1. The peak was at age 31 – 35 years. More than half of the sample was in age 25 to 35 years. Table 1 shows that 53 (35.3%) of the abusers were illiterate, and 70

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(46.7%) finished the primary school. Only 2 of the abusers (1.3%) had higher education (after the secondary school). Thirty (20%) of the abusers were unemployed, 100 (66.67%) were self-employed and only 18 (12%) were employed. These findings were presented in Table 2. The reported drugs abused by prisoners were benzhexol 95 (63.3%), diazepam (32%) and alcohol 48 (32%). Distribution of the abusers according to criminal act is shown in Table 3. Out of those charged with murder, burglary, Robbery, terrorism, and rape the abuser were 69 (69.7%), 28 (58.3%), 31 (63.8%), 11 (18.9%) and 2 (50%), respectively. Criminal act was significantly associated with SUDs.

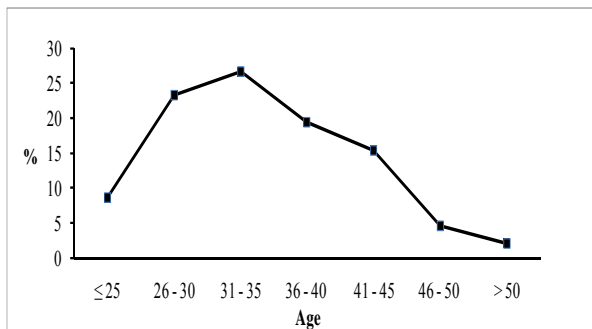


Fig. 1 Age distribution of prisoners with substance use disorders

Table 1: Distribution of educational level among prisoners with SUDs

Educational status	Substance use disorder	
	No.	%
Illiterate	53	35.3
Primary	70	46.7
Secondary	25	16.7
High education	2	1.3

Table 2: Distribution of occupation among prisoner with SUDs

Occupation	Substance use disorder	
	No.	%
Unemployed	30	20
Irregular job	100	66.67
Employed	18	12.0
Student	2	1.3

Table 3 Criminal acts distribution in prison

Type of crime	Substance use disorder		Control	
	No.	%	No.	%
	Murder	69	69.7	30
Burglary	28	58.3	20	41.7
Robbery	31	73.8	11	26.2
Terrorism	11	22.9	37	77.1
Illegal residency	2	7.7	24	92.3
Fraud and deception	6	30.0	14	70.0
others	3	42.9	4	57.1

Discussion:

The revealed rate of SUDs (12.5%) was much lower than that in literature (10, 11) which reported that half of the prisoners met criteria for drug abuse of dependence. This difference might be attributed to the fact that literatures reflect the situation in the developed countries. The observed rate (12.5%) was lower than that recently reported in Baghdad among general population (23.7%) (9) and much higher than that in IMHS (8). This difference might be attributed to the differences in sample, instrument and interviewers. Stigma attached to alcohol and substance abuse in addition to being in prison with probable militant personnel may further contribute for the lower rate reported in this study (12.5%). Holding a survey after the diminish control of militants in Baghdad revealed higher rate in Baghdad (9) than that in IMHS (8) which was carried out during years of conflict. The availability of & easy access to such drugs may be contributing factors for this high rate of abuse The rate of alcohol abuse among prisoner (32%) is higher than that reported in Baghdad among general population (17.8%) (9) and much higher than that in IMHS (0.9%) (8). IMHS was carried out during widespread violence and the survey in Baghdad carried out when the secular life return to Baghdad and militants were controlled. The reported high figure might be due to being prisoner. In the line of previous studies (1-3,8,9), the peak age of SUDs was 31 -35 years. In consistent with that of other workers (10-12), drug offenders are faced with specific obstacles e.g. higher rate of unemployment and higher rate of illiteracy. The commonest consumed drug was benzhexol (63.3%). In western countries, abuse of benzhexol has been noted with increasing frequency in recent years among disaffected and disadvantaged youth attending psychiatric clinics, due to its hallucinogenic and euphrogenic properties (13-15). In Iraq, benzhexol known between abusers as “Abu Shjae’h”, and among terrorists it eliminates guilt feelings and gives them muscular power¹⁶. Previous literatures (14, 15) describe benzhexol abusers: almost they had all difficulties in sustaining emotional relationships, they had unfairly failed to develop work skill, and none of them had tertiary education and over half of them had appeared in the Court for non-drug related charges. This picture was further repeated by the findings in this study. A significant association between SUDs and criminal acts was observed (p 0.0002). The criminal acts were murder, burglary, robbery, abduction, terrorism, fraud and deception, illegal possession of weapon, and rape. Drugs use and criminal behavior certainly seem to be correlated (12). In recent years, a growing body of researches has examined the relationships between the drug used and the violent crime (12, 17-19).

Conclusion:

High rate of SUDs was revealed among prisoners. SUDs were significantly associated with criminal behavior.

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