

ABSTRACT

The distribution of Psychiatric Disorders among the inmates in jail in a given geographical area in Jamaica.

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Since many of the prisoners referred from police lock-ups for psychiatric assessment did in fact show psychiatric disorder, it was decided to examine them over a three month period to ascertain what percentage had a major psychiatric disorder. 121 men and 19 women were examined using two sets of questionnaires. 64.3% of the study population had a diagnosable major mental disorder.

Two main groups of disorders were identified, (1) substance abuse disorders and (2) psychotic disorders. 54.3% of the study subjects had diagnosable psychoactive substance use disorders, whilst 18.6% had psychotic disorders. The substances abused in order of decreasing frequency were cannabis, cocaine and alcohol. There were 26 psychotics, 12 of whom had a dual diagnosis.

There was an association between crimes of theft and substance abuse, while the psychotic group was associated with violent crimes (65.4%).

The vast majority of the prisoners with a psychiatric diagnosis accused of violent crimes were aged 21 to 35 years, suggesting a possible high risk age group for psychiatric disorder and violent crimes.

These results have important implications for the future planning and management of the psychiatric prisoners within the jail system in this parish. Since over 50% of the jail population are substance abusers and 18.6% are psychotics with no direct provisions for therapy for these persons, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of National Security should work together to put plans in place for an improved health care scheme for these prisoners.