Prevalence rates of mental disorders in consecutively admitted female prisoners in Chile

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Objective. Rates of mental disorders in prisoners are estimated to be particularly high in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs). Empirical evidence in the field, especially in female prisoners mental health, is sparse. The present study explores prevalence rates of mental disorders in consecutively admitted female prisoners in Chile.

Method. A random sample of 198 consecutively admitted female prisoners was assessed using the Mini International Psychiatric Interview (MINI).

Results. High prevalence rates of current affective disorders (52.5%; CI 45.5–59.1), current anxiety disorders (29.3%; 22.7–35.6), such as posttraumatic stress disorder (16.2%; 11.1–21.7), and substance use disorders (32.3%; 25.8–39.4) were found. Twenty-three point seven per cent (18.2–30.8) were addicted to illegal drugs, mostly cocaine (21.2%; 15.7–27.3).

Conclusion. The development of mental health services in the penal justice system should address high rates of current affective and current anxiety disorders as well as substance use disorders at admission to the penal justice system. Prevalence rates of current affective disorders appear to be higher, whereas substance use disorders are less frequent in Chilean female prisoners compared to female prisoners in high-income countries.