



NEW RESEARCH INTO MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS AMONG NEW ZEALAND PRISONERS

June 2016

In 2014, the Department successfully applied for funds from the Government's Proceeds of Crime allocation under the Methamphetamine Action Plan to conduct a study into the prevalence of mental health and substance abuse issues amongst prisoners.

Over 1200 prisoners were interviewed across 13 prisons between March and July 2015 and this report presents the findings from those assessment interviews.

The study and the subsequent report "Comorbid substance use disorders and mental health disorders among New Zealand prisoners" found that prisoners have relatively high rates of mental health and substance use disorders that were often undetected and under-treated.

What we found

The study showed that prisoners were considerably more likely to have substance abuse difficulties than is found among the general population, and their mental health was worse.

In the 12 month period leading up to the interview:

- 62% of prisoners were found to have either a mental disorder or substance use disorder; and
- 20% had both a mental disorder and a substance use disorder
- a small but significant minority (7%) reported experiencing psychotic symptoms (e.g. hearing voices, seeing things that were not real, delusions)
- almost a quarter (24%) had some form of mood disorder, eg depression
- a similar percentage (23%) met the criteria for an anxiety disorder, eg panic, post-traumatic stress
- 6% had attempted suicide
- less than half (46%) with mental health or substance use disorders had received any form of treatment

- almost half of all prisoners had a substance use disorder, which was 13 times higher than the general population.

This is the first time in 17 years that such a study such as this has been conducted. A similar study came out in 1999, the "National Study of Psychiatric Morbidity in New Zealand Prisons". Results are broadly similar, although there has been an increase in rates of mood and anxiety disorders.

The findings of the "Comorbid substance use disorders and mental health disorders among New Zealand prisoners report" has directly contributed to a new mental health package targeted at offenders that will begin in June 2016.

A copy of the report is available on the Corrections website:

www.corrections.govt.nz