

Assessment of problematic level of past illicit drug use among male prison inmates in prison, Galle, Sri Lanka using drug abuse screening test-20

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Past illicit drug use and drug related offences are becoming an increasingly common problem among prison inmates in Sri Lanka. Identification of problematic drug use at the time of admission helps to deliver comprehensive rehabilitation care for these inmates during imprisonment. This study aimed to assess the problematic level of past illicit drug use among male prison inmates in the prison in Galle. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 449 incarcerated males using the simple random sampling method based on prisoner's register. Prisoners who were diagnosed to have psychiatric illnesses, mentally unsound to respond to the study questionnaires, admitted prior to one year at the time of data collection and female prisoners were excluded from the study. Problematic level of past illicit drug use was assessed using Sinhala and Tamil version of Drug Abuse Screening Test – 20 (DAST 20). Judgmental validity of the questionnaire was assessed by a panel of experts. Levels of problematic drug use was defined according to American Society of Addiction Medicine Placement Criteria. Data was analyzed using SPSS software. The response rate was 98.2% (n=441), and the majority of the participants were residents of Galle district (n=419, 95.0%), Sinhalese (n= 415, 94.1%) and Buddhist (n= 411, 93.2%) with a mean age (\pm SD) of 33.2 (\pm 9.5) years. Past illicit drug use was reported among 57.6% (n=254) of the participants. Among them, 8.3% (n=21) had a severe problematic level of illicit drug use, and 27.2% (n=70) reported a substantial level, whereas both of those levels required inpatient rehabilitation care. Prison inmates who were in older (>30 years) age group (p=0.009), who had poly drug use (p<0.001) or were addicted to illicit drugs (p<0.001) were more likely to report problematic use of illicit drugs. A significant amount of prison inmates with history of illicit drug use required inpatient rehabilitation care. A proper system for early identification and referral of these individuals for rehabilitation is recommended to prevent drug related problems in future.

Keywords: drug abuse screening test, inmate welfare and past illicit drug use.

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