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Psychiatric disorders among prisoners: An Egyptian study

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Introduction: In Egypt, a few small scale studies were conducted to study the real state of the mental health of the prisoners, the data about the situation of the mentally ill offenders in Egypt still not clear, especially with the increasing number of prisons, prisoners and with the multiplicity of penalties and crimes. This research hypothesize that the prevalence of psychiatrically ill Egyptian prisoners is higher than the prevalence of psychiatrically ill population outside the prison. Also, this research hypothesize that there are multiple factors which affect psychiatric disorders among prisoners.

The practical part: This is a cross- sectional study on adult prisoners of both sexes with different crimes and different penalties, from age of 18 years old to 65 years old that have spent at least one year in the prison. This study was done in 16 prisons all over Egypt, during a period of 2 years from the 1st of March 2012 to end of February 2014. The target sample size is 1350 prisoners, in a ratio of 50 prisoners for each thousand. Sampling Technique was stratified proportional sample. The interview with prisoners had two parts: the first part was for measuring different factors associated with psychiatric disorders inside the prison: sex, age, education, work and visits inside the prison, types of crime, duration of sentence and times of arrest inside the prison, feeling of prejudice, feeling of shame, affection of home responsibility and effect of organic disorders and substance abuse inside and outside the prison. The second part was applying standardized psychiatric assessment.

Results: Over all point Prevalence of psychiatric disorders among studied prisoners is 22.4%. The highest Prevalence of personality disorder between prisoners all over Egypt was 12.3% for antisocial type. Psychiatric disorders between prisoners are statistically significant regarding age groups, work inside the prison, family visits, officers and prisoners' maltreatment, admission times, different types of crimes, substance abuse outside the prison, past History of psychiatric disorders outside and inside the prison.

Conclusions: Work inside the prison and family visits are protective from psychiatric disorders in prisoners, while substance abuse outside the prison and past history of psychiatric disorders inside the prison are risk factors for psychiatric disorders. Admission times and multiple types of crimes are statistically protective from psychiatric disorders but this is may be explained by prisoners personality traits and their capability to break the law which make them less vulnerable to stress and psychiatric disorders. A lot of Egyptian prisoners are incarcerated due to social, environmental and financial rationales; there is no excuse for any person to break the law and regulations, but bad bringing up of some families for their kids, not to grow them on values, manners and religion make them risky to acquire different forms of corruption which was disseminated in the Egyptian society all over the past 60 years.

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