

virus is strikingly related to that of the other two. Finally, homosexual men have a high prevalence of HIV and hepatitis B virus infections with a low prevalence of antibodies against hepatitis C virus, the presence of which is not related to the presence of either HIV or hepatitis B virus.

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Women in prison and use of illicit drugs before arrest

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From 1979 to 1988 the number of sentenced women in prison rose by 32% yet the number of women sentenced for drug offences increased by over 400%.¹ We present the results of a retrospective survey of drug use before arrest among female prisoners.

Subjects, methods, and results

We interviewed a random sample of 272 women serving a prison sentence (a quarter of the prison population) about drug use in the six months before arrest. Data collected included the type of drug and the frequency and route of use. Dependence on a drug was defined as daily use plus withdrawal symptoms on abstinence and an acceptance by the woman that she was dependent. Drug users were asked about their previous contact with treatment agencies and their current attitude to treatment without drugs.

Cannabis was the illicit drug that had been used most commonly, with 82 women reporting use at least once a week. It was excluded from consideration of drug dependence as it is of minor clinical importance.

Sixty three women (23%; 95% confidence interval 18% to 28%) were identified as drug dependent (table). Most had used opiates, alone or in combination with other drugs, and most had injected during the six months before their arrest. Of these 63 women, 24 had been sentenced for drug offences and 32 for theft. Thirty seven stated that they would accept treatment if it was offered, including 17 who seemed to have a strong desire for treatment. The 26 women who expressed no desire for treatment usually stated that drugs were no longer a problem; only one or two were resigned to a return to dependency. Two drug users were positive for HIV (the number tested was unknown).

Comment

Nearly a quarter of sentenced female prisoners were dependent on drugs at the time of their offence. Despite recent diversification in facilities for treating drug users² one third of the women who were dependent on drugs reported having had no contact with services before entering prison. Our findings support the claim by the advisory council on the misuse

Type of drug used before arrest by female prisoners who were drug dependent, and number reporting previous treatment for dependency

Type of drug	Injected during six months before arrest	Reported previous treatment for drug dependency	Total
Opiates alone	22	22	34
Opiates and other drugs	14	14	16
Non-opiate drugs	6	4	13
Total	42	40	63

of drugs that prison or the courts can offer an important point of contact for drug users not seen elsewhere.³ Women's prisons have no equivalent of the therapeutic regimens available to men at Grendon and Wormwood Scrubs annexe. Many of the women expressed a desire for treatment. Motivation is difficult to assess in prison; the only real test is to make treatment available.

Past criticism of provision for drug users drew attention to the absence of effective liaison at the time of release.¹ A recent policy statement by the Home Office on developing services in prisons emphasises the need for coordination between prisons and outside agencies and encourages prison doctors to take a more active role in this process.⁵

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Notice of inadvertent duplicate publication

The *BMJ* regrets that the paper entitled "Quality of life of elderly people after surgery for benign oesophageal stricture" by Dr B N M Jayawardhana and others (16 December 1989, pp 1503-4) was substantially similar to a paper published in *Age and Ageing* entitled "Benign oesophageal stricture: the place of surgery in the management of elderly patients" (January 1990, pp 31-5). Although these papers included some of the same group of patients and addressed the same question, neither editor was informed of the existence of the other paper, in contravention to our instructions to authors and to internationally agreed guidelines.