

**EXAMINING FACTORS INFLUENCING DRUG USE BY PERSONS SERVING A SENTENCE OF IMPRISONMENT IN THE STARA ZAGORA PRISON**

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**Abstract**

This article presents the results from the first two stages of a research project titled “Drug Abuse and Risk Groups. Studying the Three-Component Relationship *Gender - Type of Psychoactive Substances Used - Type of the Crime Committed*, in Prisoners”. The project is implemented by a research team at the Department of Social Work, Faculty of Medicine, Trakia University, Stara Zagora.

Conducting of this research was inspired by the rise in the drug use among prisoners and the growing number of crimes committed either under the influence of drugs or in order to obtain money for buying drugs.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the factors influencing drug use among prisoners in the Prison of Stara Zagora. An empirical research study has been conducted by means of a survey questionnaire, involving 122 prisoners.

The results from the research study have brought out the significance of the general prevention as a factor influencing drug use among prisoners. On these grounds recommendations are made with regard to these persons for the benefit of the social work practice.

**Keywords:** *persons serving a sentence, psychoactive substance abuse, drugs, drug use, crime committed*

**Introduction**

Prisons comprise a specific and challenging social environment where organization of life is quite different from life outside. The restrictions and the lack of access to many of the everyday activities considered as normal, result in a number of behavioral disorders in prisoners. [1]. Among the criminals who become a part of the criminal justice system and the prison system, the percentage of drug users is consistently higher compared to the general population. [2] Illegal drug use is almost by default associated with criminal behavior. [3]

When it comes to psychoactive substance abuse, the prisoner community on a global scale is believed to be a particularly vulnerable group.

In the specialized literature, the issue related to drug use among prisoners has been studied also by other authors.

International research on drug use among prisoners shows that drug abuse is a serious problem in prisons worldwide. In the UK, the social and environmental factors influencing drug use in prisons have been studied. [4]

Factors related to drug use in prisons have also been studied in Norway. The conclusion from the study is that Norwegian prisons report a widespread drug use after imprisonment but also prior to it. The findings have brought out the importance of elaborating programs for dealing with the drug use in prisons and emphasizing on the significance of an effective treatment of the drug addicts. [5]

In the specialized literature at a national level, the factors influencing drug use among prisoners have been analyzed under the project “Social Work in Prisons”, conducted by the

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Department of Social and Special Pedagogy at Konstantin Preslavski University of Shumen. This project has been dedicated to social issues encountered by prisoners such as employment, returning home, social adaptation, reuniting with friends, etc. [6]

The risk family factors associated with addiction to psychoactive substances have been analyzed also by other Bulgarian authors who have found out an increase in the number of drug users among the Bulgarian population and an increase in the number of drug-related crimes among young people. [7]

Reducing the adverse drug effects on prisoners is the subject of the project *Swiss-Bulgarian Cooperation Project to Reduce Drug Use and HIV in Prisons*. The findings show that a significant number of the drug users have committed a number of crimes and have been convicted repeatedly. [8]

The national representative survey “Drug Use Among Prisoners in Bulgaria: Overall Situation and Trends”, conducted in 2006, found out that more than one third of the prisoners had used drugs at least once prior to and/or after their imprisonment. [9]

This explains the topicality of the examined factors influencing drug use among prisoners.

### Materials and Methods

#### Stages of the Project Study

This research study is a part of the research project titled “Drug Abuse and Risk Groups. Studying the Three-Component Relationship *Gender - Type of Psychoactive Substances Used - Type of the Crime Committed*, in Prisoners”. The project is implemented by a research team at the Social Work Department.

The research study comprises of three stages. Stage One includes preparation and involves the study of theoretical sources related to the use of psychoactive substances. Stage Two consists of elaboration the survey questionnaire and conducting the survey among the target group. Stage Three consists of the analysis of the survey results.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is presenting and analyzing the factors influencing drug use in persons serving a sentence of imprisonment in the Stara Zagora Prison.

#### Research Tasks

1. Determining the socio-demographic characteristics of the target group.
2. Analysis of the factors influencing drug use in persons serving a sentence of imprisonment in the Stara Zagora Prison.

#### Object and Subject of the Research

The object of the present study are the prisoners in the Prison of Stara Zagora.

The subject of the research are the factors influencing drug use among prisoners in Stara Zagora Prison

#### Stages of the Research

The proper conducting of the empirical study is based on the three main stages required for such a study:

- Initial preparation: includes formulation of the purpose and tasks of the study, definition of terms and elaboration of the survey questionnaire;
- Primary data collection for the purposes of the research study;
- Data processing and analysis, including transfer of the results on an electronic data storage medium and their coding, primary data error control and statistical analysis of the data

### Research Methods

The methods we have used in our research study are:

- Theoretical study of the literature sources dealing with the use of psychoactive substances in prisons and identification of the factors influencing it;
- Survey and analysis of the results received

The following main types of statistical analysis have been used: descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA) with a significance level for a null hypothesis ( $p > 0.05$ ) and the Student-Fischer T-test.

### Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The empirical study was conducted on the territory of Stara Zagora Prison and involved 122 prisoners. The survey questionnaire was filled in by the respondents themselves and voluntarily. It included 14 questions related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, the use of psychoactive substances and the attitude of the respondents towards drugs, as well as information related to the nature of the crime committed.

The respondents were divided in groups by age, employment history and education as it follows: (**Table 1**)

The biggest was the number of the persons aged 31-50 yrs.

In terms of employment history, similarities were observed in the persons with no employment history, with employment history of 5 years, and with employment history of more than 10 years.

The biggest was the number of the prisoners with secondary education. The lowest was the number of the respondents without formal education.

From the above sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the empirical study, the following conclusion can be drawn:

The persons involved in the study were full - aged, unemployed but at working age.

### Results and Discussion

The survey conducted among prisoners helped us identify the following factors: drug use, frequency of use, adverse health effect resulting from drug use, drug distribution, drug use among the prisoners' friends and family, awareness about the criminal liability for drug use, distribution and possession.

The statistical processing of the data revealed some particular effects of those factors as presented below in **Table 2**:

Drug distribution is a factor with statistical significance on drug use. The T-test reveals that the respondents who do not distribute drugs are more likely with statistical significance to use drugs. In other words, regardless of drug distribution, people who do not distribute drugs are more likely with statistical significance to use drugs.

**This result confirms the findings of the NGO Crime Stoppers Australia [10] that a large part of the drug dealers are unaware of what they sell since they are at the lower levels of the pyramid and do not have precise information about what the drug contains. This fact most probably is among the reasons explaining why drug dealers do not use drugs.**

#### Table 3.:

Drug-addicts among the close family and friends is a factor with a statistical significance on drug use. The T-test shows that the respondents who do not have drug-addicts among their close family and friends, are more likely with statistical significance to use drugs. Drug-addicts among the respondent's close family and friends do not increase the likelihood of drug use. The results

presented and their analysis are within the context of the present empirical study. The family environment as a factor influencing drug use is not the subject of our study. However, in the specialized literature it is considered from various aspects.

**Mann (2003) asserts that the good family relations, e.g. a tight-knit family and consistent rules, significantly decrease the risk of alcohol and drug abuse, while the bad family relations increase it. [11]**

**In their study, Foo, Y. C. et. all [12] state that drug use is influenced by several factors in the family environment – sound financial standing, curiosity, tension, adultery. In this sense, family is considered a very significant factor influencing drug use since its role can be preventive but also instigating – a problem which could become the subject of future studies.**

### **Table 4.:**

Awareness about the criminal liability for drug use, distribution and possession, is a factor with a statistically significant effect on drug use. The T-test reveals that when there is no information on the criminal liability for drug use, distribution and possession, it is more likely with statistical significance that people use drugs.

The National Institute of Justice in the United States [13] summarizes the importance of prevention into 5 main points: 1. The certainty of being caught is a vastly more powerful deterrent than the punishment; 2. Sending an individual convicted of a crime to prison isn't a very effective way to deter crime; 3. Police deter crime by increasing the perception that criminals will be caught and punished; 4. Increasing the severity of punishment does little to deter crime; 5. There is no proof that the death penalty deters criminals.

The present results show that general prevention is a factor which prevents drug use with statistical significance

## **Conclusion**

The analysis of the data collected in the study of the factors influencing drug use among prisoners is of significant importance for reconsidering the measures related to general prevention and public awareness, as well as the work which should be done within the family.

## **Statement for Potential Conflicts of Interest**

The authors report no potential conflicts of interest.

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**Table 1.** Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Age	Aged 18-30 yrs.		Aged 31-50 yrs.		Above 50 yrs.		
	44	36,07 %	62	50,82 %	16	13,11 %	
Employment history	Up to 5 years		Up to 10 years		Above 10 years		No employment history
	36	29,51 %	16	13,11 %	36	29,51 %	
Education	Lower secondary education		Upper secondary education		Higher education		No formal education
	48	39,34 %	58	47,54 %	9	7,38 %	
							7   5,74 %

**Table 2.** Influence of Drug Distribution onto Drug Use

Invariable	Variable	Degree	x	F, p	T test
Drug distribution	Drug use	Yes	1.05	F=68.92, p<0.01	t <sub>2,1</sub> =8.30, at p<0.01
		No	1.69		

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**Table 3.** Influence of Drug-Addicted Friends and Family on Drug Use

Invariable	Variable	Degree	x	F, p	T test
Drug-addicted friends and family	Drug use	Yes	1.13	F=47.86, p<0.01	t <sub>2,1</sub> =6.91, at p<0.05
		No	1.69		

**Table 4.** Influence of the awareness about the criminal liability for drug use, distribution and possession

Invariable	Variable	Degree	x	F, p	T test
Awareness about the criminal liability for drug use, distribution and possession.	Drug use	Yes	1.45	F=4.58, p<0.05	t <sub>2,1</sub> =2.14, at p<0.05
		No	1.72		