Impact of COVID-19 on drug use and drug related interventions in European prisons

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Workshop - 7.K. - The impact of COVID-19 response measures on health and healthcare for people in detention in Europe - 17:30 - 18:30

EUPHA 2021, 10 – 12 November 2021
Rapid assessments on impact of COVID19 on drug problem

AIM:

to investigate the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on drug issue and the associated national response measures implemented in Europe in the community and in prison

THREE RAPID ASSESSMENTS:

- Drug service provision and help-seeking – May 2020
- Patterns of drug use, risks and harms – June 2020
- Drug markets, use, harms and drug services – April 2021

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/topics/covid-19
Containment measures as drivers for changes in the drug issue

- **From March 2020 (first lock down):** containment and hygienic measures, including reduction of internal and extremal people movements, (external visits, movements of people in and out of prison, interruption of collective activities and in reach services), early release, quarantine for newcomers

- **From July 2020,** some countries relaxed restrictions in prisons, other countries kept strict restrictions

- **By May 2021,** most countries back to strict restrictions in prisons, albeit with some exceptions

- **Recent situation:** release of restrictive measures in most countries

Impact on prison drug market

- Disruption of drug trafficking routes into prison
- Reduced drugs availability inside prison
- Riots and violence
  - Over the prison wall
  - Use of new technologies: drones

- From June 2020 some routes restored

Impact on drug use in prison

From March to May 2020 (15 countries)

- Continue reduced use in 6 countries - back to normal in 2 countries
- Up misuse of BZD and of substitution medication
- Up alcohol produced in prison
- Up severity of drug use
- Overdoses, self-harms, suicide attempts in PUD

From June 2020 (22 countries)

- Continue reduced use in 6 countries - back to normal in 2 countries
- Up misuse of BZD and of substitution medication
- Up alcohol produced in prison
- Up severity of drug use
- Overdoses, self-harms, suicide attempts in PUD

Impact on prison drug services

DISCONTINUATION (2020) - REDUCTION (2021)
interventions involving people gathering services provided by external services

REDUCTION
psycho-social individual counselling therapeutic communities linkage to external care social reintegration

NO (or almost no) CHANGES
health assessment detoxification OST testing/treatment infectious diseases condom distribution NSP overdose prevention drug testing

Challenges, questions and opportunities

✔ **Drug market and drug use** more visible inside prison
  - structural difficulties exacerbated (e.g. isolation, internet connection, etc.)

✔ **Drug related interventions**: maintaining provision /COVID19 preventive measures
  - lack of health and prison staff: accentuated due to COVID-19
  - concerns on quality of therapeutic relation
  - linkage to care as essential part of drug treatment

✔ **Innovation**:
  - telemedicine
  - online personal contacts
  - reinforced cooperation security and health staff
  - overdose prevention
  - in-reach re-established

✔ **Large country disparities**, increasing with economic recession

✔ **Humanisation** of prison conditions (overcrowding)

✔ **Impact of early release** on drug issue: preparedness

✔ **Monitoring and research**

More information at:
https://www.emcdda.europa.eu


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Thank you!

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