

The prevalence, nature and severity of mental health problems among federal male inmates in Canadian penitentiaries (R-24, 1991)

This research report describes in detail the design of the mental health survey commissioned by the Correctional Service of Canada in September 1988. This national survey assessed the prevalence, nature and severity of mental health problems among the male inmate population and provided precise information on prevalence rates for the major categories of mental disorder at national and regional levels, as well as across a variety of offender categories.

The survey was unique in that it relied on a structured interviewing instrument -- the Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DIS) -- and employed objective diagnostic criteria described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DIM 111) of the American Psychiatric Association. A total of 2,185 DIS interviews were conducted with a stratified (by region) random sample of inmates.

The results of the survey are organized around eight separate groups of diagnoses: organic, psychotic, depressive, anxiety, psycho-sexual, antisocial, substance abuse/dependence and alcohol use/dependence disorders.

This major survey of mental disorders among penitentiary inmates has shown that mental health is rapidly becoming one of the major challenges facing federal corrections.