

Psychotropic Medication Prescriptions among Incarcerated Individuals in Kansas

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Introduction. The high prevalence of mental illness in the U.S. penal system is well-documented, but limited health data impedes effective treatment assessment and health surveillance. This observational study aimed to characterize psychotropic medication use among inmates aged 18 and older within the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) who had at least one psychiatric diagnosis.

Methods. Data were manually extracted from facility health records by KDOC administration and de-identified for analysis. Descriptive statistics and chi-square analyses were used to examine differences in psychotropic medication use by age, gender, facility, and mental health severity as of April 2023.

Results. Of approximately 8,590 inmates, 44% (n = 4,090) had a documented mental illness. Among them, 72% (n = 2,936) were prescribed at least one psychotropic medication, totaling 4,967 prescriptions. Of those receiving medications, 49% (n = 1,440) were diagnosed with any mental illness (AMI), 42% (n = 1,222) with severe mental illness (SMI), and 9% (n = 265) with severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). An estimated 28% (n = 1,154) of diagnosed inmates were not prescribed psychotropics. Topeka Correctional Facility had the highest proportion of psychiatric prescriptions relative to its inmate population (44%, n = 314).

Conclusions. Mental illness is prevalent in the KDOC population, with psychotropic medication use influenced by mental health severity and gender. Further research is needed to better understand and support the mental health needs of incarcerated individuals.

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