



Pathology & Biology Section – 2005

G72 Causes of Death Among People in the Prison of Loos (Northern France), 1997-2003

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People in prison are more likely to die prematurely, especially of violent causes, than people who are not in custody. Some of these deaths could be avoided. The goal of this presentation is to study the causes of death (violent and natural) among people in the prison of Loos.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by explaining what problems are present in French jails.

Methods: The authors examined the causes of death in both prisons of Loos for detainees in custody and sentenced detainees, from 1997 to 2003. The collected data included age, sex, work, cause of the death, location of the death, and history of addiction. The causes of death were categorized as violent (accidental intoxication, suicide, or homicide) or natural (cancer, cardiovascular disease).

Results: Forty-nine persons died in prison during the studied period: 47 male and 2 females ranging in age from 17 to 54 years. The average age was 30 years. There were 34 suicides, 4 natural deaths, and 11 deaths involving the presence of drugs or alcohol. In France, all deaths in prison (natural, homicide, accident, suicide, toxic) are autopsied and findings are described.

In this study the cases of suicides are described more precisely. Among the people who committed suicide, 30% were jailed after conviction for a sexual assault (34 of the 49 cases). Among them, 17 had already been sentenced and the others were waiting for a judgment. The position of the body and the presence of another detainee in the cell was studied. The method of suicide was mainly hanging with a large tie (29/34).

Discussion: The high number of deaths in custody resulting from selfharmful behavior has important implications for the criminal justice system and the penitentiary administration. The authorities have a high responsibility to prevent deaths in jail. It is important to develop preventive health systems inside the jails to prevent suicides. Psychiatric treatments and therapy must be introduced to reduce the risks. An awareness of these causes might be of assistance in developing mechanisms to further reduce fatalities in this setting.

Prison, Death, Suicide