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THE „VIENNESE INSTRUMENT FOR SUICIDALITY IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS“(VISCI) - EVALUATION OF TWO YEARS ROUTINE ADMINISTRATION IN AUSTRIAN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Suicide rates in prisoners are considerably higher than in the general population. A better identification of mental illnesses and alcohol use problems and avoidance of placing prisoners at high risk in single accommodation, are considered as key components of successful suicide prevention in these high-risk circumstances. The “Viennese Instrument for Suicidality in Correctional Institutions” (VISCI) is based on results of a large case-control study assessing suicide in prison inmates and comparisons with surviving controls. The screening instrument has well established psychometric properties differentiating well between suicides and non-suicides. VISCI routine administration in Austrian Correctional Institutions was introduced in December 2007 and data from the first two years of routine use were analysed for various aspects. During this period, VISCI was administered in > 15.000 admissions, recommending for 21.5 % to avoid placement in single accommodation, and for 6.6 % additionally a quick referrals to medical and psychiatric care. During these two years, 6 (2008) and 7 (2009) suicides occurred in all 28 Austrian jails and prisons, resulting in a suicide rate of 75.2 per 100.000 inmates, a marked reduction of suicide incidents compared to the years before implementation of screening procedures and interventions (mean suicide rate between 1992 and 2007 was 166.2, SD 5.5). However, it has to be stated that results of VISCI administrations are available for only two years up to now. With a longer period studied we hope we will have the possibility to demonstrate the effectiveness of this screening tool with even more strength.