

The Stability of Diagnosis over Time in a Register-based Study of Psychiatric Inpatients

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Background: Diagnosis at first admission is an important variable in epidemiological studies but concerns regarding stability need to be addressed.

Aims: To investigate the persistence of diagnosis at first admission within 10 years in a nationwide cohort of psychiatric inpatients with 25 year follow-up.

Methods: A cohort was established from a database of all persons admitted to psychiatric wards in Iceland from 1983 to 2008. Those who became 18 during the study period 1983-2007 were selected for this analysis. The outcomes were the diagnosis at first diagnosis, and within 1, 2, 5 or 10 years, after first admission for the following diagnostic groups; substance use disorders, mood disorders, personality disorders, schizophrenia and related disorders were studied using descriptive methods.

Results: Some 4959 were included in the study, 50.4% were men (n=2504). Mean (sd) age at first admission was 27 (\pm 6.1) years. Most or 51% (2542/4959) were admitted more than once during the study period. Of those who were ever diagnosed with an SUD 87% (2214/2535) received an SUD diagnosis at first admission. In mood disorders, 80% (1771/2203) and anxiety disorders 76% were diagnosed at first admission. Only 67% (372/559) of those ever diagnosed with schizophrenia or similar and 60% (663/1098) of those ever diagnosed with personality disorders received the diagnosis at first admission.

Conclusion: In register-based research diagnosis at first admission is a good indicator for SUD and mood disorders, but less so for personality disorders and schizophrenia or related disorders.