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# **Mental health of inmates in a Danish maximum security penitentiary**

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# The Study

*Mental health of inmates in a Danish maximum security penitentiary (Harboe, 2016, unpublished)*

## Background:

The number of psychologically unstable and mentally ill inmates in the Danish prison system is high and increasing rapidly. This tendency has negative implications for inmates as well as the prison staff, who are affected by conflicts and unpredictable, violent behaviour.

## Aim of the study:

To examine the mental health situation of inmates serving a sentence in a maximum security prison.

## Methods:

PSE (Present State Examination), ASRS (Adult ADHD Rating Scale), WHO-5 (well-being), Addiction Profile, Prescription Medication, Former suicidal behaviour.

## Disclosures:

None. ProSpons is a NGO





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## The Study

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### Participants:

N = 208 male prison inmates

N = 78 participants with non danish citizenship

N = 35 gang members

*Participation was voluntary and participants did not receive any financial compensation for their participation*

### Duration:

The project began on March 1st 2014 and ended September 30th 2015.

Every participant was interviewed for approximately 60-90 minutes

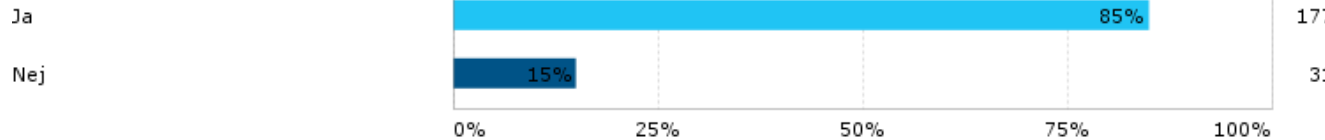


## The Study

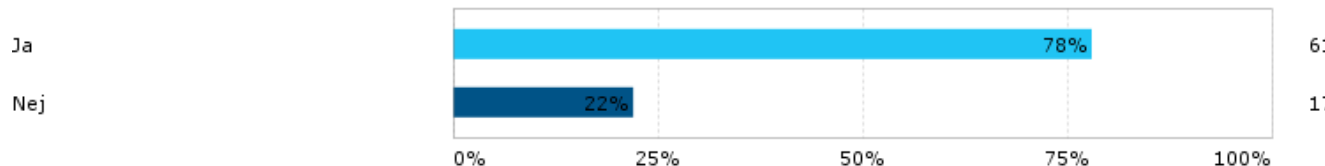
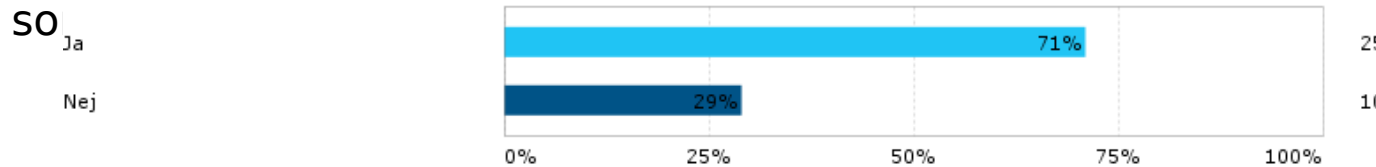
*Mental health of inmates in a Danish maximum security penitentiary (Harboe, 2016, unpublished)*

### Findings:

The findings indicate that almost 9 out of 10 participants have indications of substance abuse or mental health problems to such a degree that it requires treatment.



For gang members and participants with non danish citizenship the numbers are





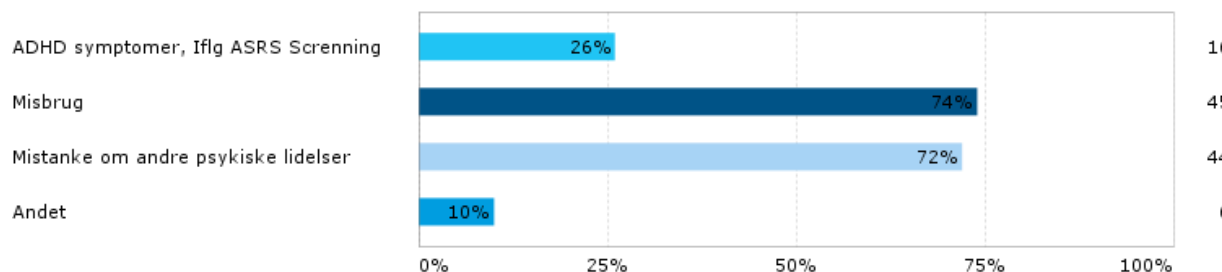
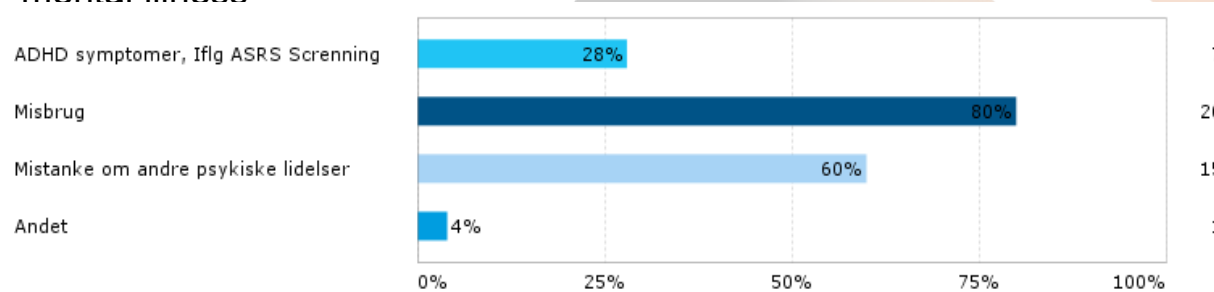
# The Study

*Mental health of inmates in a Danish maximum security penitentiary (Harboe, 2016, unpublished)*

## Findings:

*The following findings focus primarily on gang members and participants with non danish citizenship*

Findings indicate, that roughly 75-80% of the two groups have a substance abuse problem, that one in four have indications of ADHD and that 6-7 out of 10 participants suffer from at least one type of mental illness



## The Study

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### Findings particularly interesting when discussing possible radicalisation

- 66% of gang members and 56% of non danish citizens report severe aggressive behaviour in the past
- Only 34% of gang members and 44% of non danish citizens with mental health problems or substance abuse wants treatment for their difficulties. That number is more that 60% for the inmates with danish citizenship

## The Study: Practical implications

*What is the course of action following the interviews with the participants?*

- Participants with substance abuse: referral to drug/alcohol rehabilitation within the prison
- Participants with mental health problems: referral to in house psychiatric consultation and/or referral the psychiatric investigation and treatment within a psychiatric unit outside the prison
- Participants with extremist behaviour (physical and verbal): obligated written documentation of behaviour for Prison and Police.
- Participants with extremist behaviour (physical and verbal) who wants exit: further interviewing and secondary placement within a prison unit with specific treatment options



# Experiences: Mental illness implications in Exit-work

- Mental health problems can be a barrier towards achieving exit
- Inmates from the gang environment typically refuse help – also exit
- Inmates from the gang environment and non danish citizens often have violent pasts – this can be an indicator for later violent and potential extremist behaviour
- Inmates from the gang environment wanting and contemplating exit can be advised about the process while participating in the research project – we initially give them a “safe haven”
- A large part of inmates with non danish citizenship have symptoms of PTSD do to their past – this can be a barrier and carrier for exit
- Going through treatment for mental health problems or substance abuse can be an effective first strategy towards facilitating exit



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# Thank you for your attention!

**Louise Feldvoss Harboe**

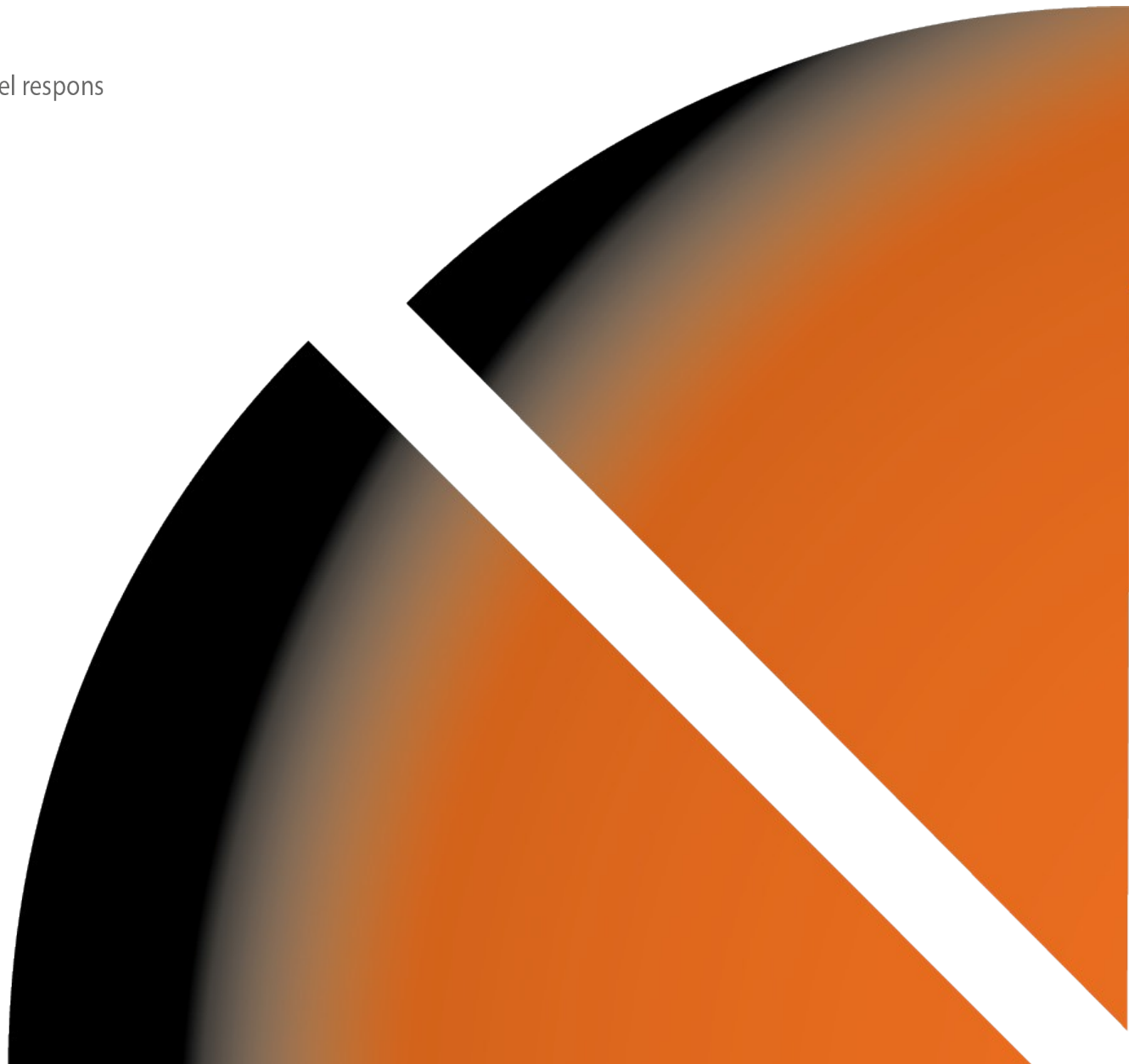
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## Content

❖ **General information** (date of arrival, length of sentence, remaining time of sentencing.)

❖ **PSE (Present State Examination)**

- ✓ Somatic
- ✓ Drug and alcohol abuse
- ✓ Cognitive
- ✓ Eating disorder
- ✓ Hallucinations, paranoia
- ✓ PTSD
- ✓ Bipolar disorder
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ OCD
- ✓ Anxiety



## Content

- ❖ ASRS (Adult ADHD Rating Scale)
- ❖ WHO-5 (WHO's well-being)
- ❖ Abuse (preferential substance)
- ❖ Medication
- ❖ Suicidal behaviour (prior suicide attempts, suicidal thoughts)