

Title

Association between criminal charges and socio-demographics and clinical profiles of state patients in Gauteng, South Africa

Background/Aim

The relationship between mental illness and criminal behaviour remains complex and influenced by social context. In South Africa, limited data exist on how socio-demographics and clinical profiles interact to shape offence patterns among state patients. This study aimed to investigate the association between criminal charges, socio-demographic characteristics, and clinical profiles of state patients admitted to a tertiary hospital in Gauteng Province.

Methodology

A quantitative, retrospective, cross-sectional study was conducted using records of 218 state patients admitted between 2010 and 2025. Data were extracted from clinical, forensic, and legal records using a structured tool. Variables included socio-demographic characteristics and clinical profiles, comprising psychiatric diagnosis, substance use, and treatment history, as well as offence type. Descriptive statistics summarised patient characteristics. Associations between variables and the nature of the primary offence were analysed using chi-square tests with Monte Carlo simulation ($B = 5,000$). Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Most patients were diagnosed with schizophrenia (58%), and clinical profiles were characterised by a high prevalence of comorbid substance use (86%) and variable treatment histories. Violent offences, including murder (28%) and sexual offences (31%), predominated. Significant associations were identified between offence type and marital status ($p = 0.023$), education level ($p = 0.003$), residence type ($p = 0.008$), and province of residence ($p = 0.004$). A clinical factor, history of violence or aggression, was also significantly associated ($p = 0.044$). No significant association was found between offence type and clinical profile variables, including psychiatric diagnosis ($p = 0.060$). Descriptive trends suggested that intellectual disability was more frequently associated with sexual offences, while psychotic disorders were more commonly linked to violent offences.

Conclusion

The nature of criminal offending among state patients appears to be more strongly influenced by socio-demographic and behavioural factors than by clinical profiles alone. These findings support a biopsychosocial approach that integrates brain, behaviour, and social context in forensic psychiatric assessment and management.