A Multisite Study of the Prevalence of Serious Mental Illness, PTSD, and Substance Use Disorders of Women in Jail

Background

- 12.6% of adults incarcerated in U.S. jails are women (Minton, 2011)

- There has been a 31% increase in the rate of incarceration of women between 2000 and 2011 (Minton, 2011)

- Studies have found that many female offenders in jail may be struggling with substantial mental health concerns, including serious mental illness, substance use disorders, and PTSD (Lynch et al., 2014)

- There is great need for accurate assessment and identification of effective intervention strategies for incarcerated women (Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
• Functioning and behavior during incarceration can be affected by mental health problems and there is continued need for treatment while in jail (Steadman et al., 2009)

• Inmates with mental illnesses are twice as likely to be charged with rule violations and four times as likely to be charged with assault on a correctional officer or another inmate (James & Glaze, 2006)

• Assessment for specific disorders that inmates may have would help care for their needs, as well as serve as a safety measure for corrections staff and other offenders

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
This multisite study aimed to answer the following research questions about women in urban and rural jails:

1. What is the current and lifetime prevalence of serious mental illness (major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and psychotic spectrum disorders) of women in jail?

2. What level of impairment is associated with their serious mental illness?

3. What is the proportion of incarcerated women with serious mental illness who also have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a substance use disorder, or both?

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
Methods

Participants:

- 491 incarcerated women
- 43% in jails in rural areas
- Average age: 35, age range: 17- to 62
- 75% had children under the age of 18
- Before incarceration 33% were employed full-time, 46% were unemployed
- 26% reported attending some high school; 34% had completed high school/GED; 36% attended at least some college
- Ethnic identities: 38% Caucasian; 37% African American; 15% Latina; 4% American Indian; 6% other
- 25% were first time offenders
- 16% were charged with or convicted of a violent crime (i.e., assault, battery, non-prostitutional sex offense, manslaughter, or homicide)
- 20% were incarcerated for two weeks or less, 49% were incarcerated for fewer than five weeks

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
Methods (cont.)

• Measures:
  - The Composite International Diagnostic Interview paper-and-pencil (PAPI version 7) modules for major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, PTSD, and substance use disorders were used in this study (CIDI, 1990)
  - Items from the Sheehan Disability Scale (Leon et al., 1997) are integrated into each CIDI module to assess impairment

• Procedures:
  - Random sample from jails in CO, ID, SC, D.C.
  - Structured interviews lasted about an hour and a half on average, (range: 1-6 hours)
Prevalence of disorders:

- The prevalence of mental disorders in the full sample was high:
  - 91% met lifetime criteria and 70% met 12-month or current criteria for at least one disorder
  - 43% met lifetime and 32% met current criteria for a serious mental illness
  - 28% met lifetime and 22% met current criteria for a major depressive disorder
  - 15% met lifetime and 8% met current criteria for bipolar disorder
  - 4% met lifetime criteria for schizophrenia spectrum disorders

- Substance use disorders were the most commonly occurring lifetime (82%) and current disorders (53%)
Findings (cont.)

• Prevalence of disorders:
  ▪ PTSD rates also were high (53% lifetime and 29% current)
  ▪ There were no significant differences in serious mental illness, PTSD, or substance use disorders among participants in rural and urban locations; there were also few differences among individuals in different jails within the same regions
  ▪ There were significant regional differences:
    • Participants in D.C. met criteria for serious mental illness significantly less frequently than those in ID and CO
    • Idaho participants also met criteria for PTSD and a substance use disorder significantly more often than participants in D.C.

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
Findings (cont.)

Functional Impairment: Many participants in the sample reported that they had notable impairment in their functioning with daily tasks (i.e., grocery shopping, work, social life) in the past 12 months due to mental health and substance use problems

- Impairment due to Mental Health:
  - 152 participants indicated having an impairment related to mental health
  - 45% of these participants rated their average impairment as a 7 or higher (scale of 1-10 with 10 being more severely impaired)

- Impairment due to PTSD Symptoms
  - 130 participants indicated having impairment related to PTSD symptoms
  - The average impairment rate was approximately 6
  - 42% of these participants reported an average of 7 or higher

- Impairment due to Substance Use
  - 263 participants reported difficulties associated with substance use
  - The average impairment in functioning was approximately 5
  - 30% of these participants indicated severe problems in functioning

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
Findings (cont.)

Comorbidity

- Lifetime rates of comorbidity were high:
  - 29% met criteria for lifetime serious mental illness and PTSD,
  - 38% met criteria for lifetime serious mental illness and a co-occurring substance use disorder
  - 46% (N=225) of the sample met criteria for lifetime PTSD and a substance use disorder
  - 26% met criteria for all three in their lifetime

- In the past 12 months:
  - 20% met criteria for a substance use disorder and serious mental illness
  - 14% met criteria for both PTSD and a serious mental illness
  - 18% (N=90) met criteria for PTSD and a substance use disorder
  - 9% met criteria for all three

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
The prevalence of serious mental illness and its co-occurrence with substance use disorders and PTSD in this multisite sample suggest the critical need for comprehensive assessment of mental health at the point of women’s entry into the criminal justice system.

In addition, these findings point to the necessity for more programs that offer alternatives to incarceration and that can address the complexity of female offenders’ treatment needs (i.e., mental health and drug courts).

Data also highlight the importance of providing a continuum of care (i.e., access to medication and mental health treatment and service coordination) during and after incarceration; this may interrupt the cycle of reoffending.

(Lynch, DeHart, Belknap, Green, Dass-Brailsford, Johnson, Whalley, 2014)
References


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References


