



MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS OF PRISON AND JAIL INMATES

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On September 6, 2006, the Bureau of Justice Statistics released the special report *Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates*. The following data come from this report. A link to the full report can be found on the Bureau of Justice Statistics web site:

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/mhppji.pdf>.

Interviews with state and federal prisoners and jail inmates indicated that at midyear 2005, more than half of all prison and jail inmates had a mental health problem. Mental health problems were defined to include either a recent history of mental illness (clinical diagnosis or treatment by a mental health professional) or symptoms of a mental health problem (based on criteria specified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition) within 12 months prior to being interviewed. Fifty-six percent of state prisoners, 45 percent of federal prisoners, and 64 percent of jail inmates had a mental health problem.

Characteristics of prison and jail inmates with mental health problems

- Female prison and jail inmates had much higher rates of mental health problems than did male prison and jail inmates.
- White prison and jail inmates were more likely than black or Hispanic prison and jail inmates to have a mental health problem.
- Prison and jail inmates age 24 or younger had the highest rate of mental health problems. Those 55 or older had the lowest rate of mental health problems.
- Those prison and jail inmates who had a mental health problem were twice as likely as prisoners and inmates without a mental health problem to have been homeless in the year before their incarceration.
- Compared to those prison and jail inmates who did not have a mental health problem, almost twice as many of those who did have a mental health problem said that they lived in a foster home, agency, or institution growing up.
- A smaller percentage of those prison and jail inmates who had a mental health problem reported having been employed in the month before their arrest than those who did not have a mental health problem.
- Prison and jail inmates who had a mental health problem were much more likely to report being physically or mentally abused in the past.
- Prison and jail inmates with a mental health problem were more likely than those without to have a caregiver who was a substance abuser.
- Prison and jail inmates with mental health problems were also shown to have higher rates of substance dependence or abuse than those without a mental health problem. Those with a mental health problem were more likely to report dependence or abuse of drugs than of alcohol.
- Approximately one-third of state prison and jail inmates said they used drugs at the time of their arrest. Marijuana or hashish was the drug most commonly used in the month before the offense.

- Among state prisoners, a slightly higher percentage of individuals with mental health problems had as their most serious offense a violent crime. Across all offenses committed by state prisoners with mental health problems, robbery was the most common serious offense (14 percent), followed by drug trafficking (13 percent) and homicide (12 percent).
- Convicted violent offenders with mental health problems were just as likely as those without to have used a weapon during the offense.
- State prisoners with a mental health problem had a mean maximum sentence that was five months longer than those without a mental health problem. In contrast, jailed inmates with a mental health problem had a mean sentence five months shorter than that for jail inmates without a mental health problem.
- Prison and jail inmates with a mental health problem had a larger number of prior probation or incarceration sentences than those without a mental health problem.
- State prisoners with a mental health problem had the highest rate of mental health treatment, followed by federal prisoners and jail inmates. Medication for the mental health problem was the most common type of treatment inmates received upon admission to prison or jail.
- Prison and jail inmates with a mental health problem were more likely than those without to have been charged with breaking facility rules.

| Characteristic | State Prison | | Federal Prison | | Local Jail | |
|---|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| | With MH problem | Without MH problem | With MH problem | Without MH problem | With MH problem | Without MH problem |
| Males | 55% | | 44% | | 63% | |
| Females | 73% | | 61% | | 75% | |
| White non-Hispanic | 62% | | 50% | | 71% | |
| Black non-Hispanic | 55% | | 46% | | 63% | |
| Hispanic | 46% | | 37% | | 51% | |
| 24 or younger | 63% | | 58% | | 70% | |
| 55 or older | 40% | | 36% | | 52% | |
| Homeless in year before incarceration | 13% | 6% | 7% | 3% | 17% | 9% |
| Ever lived in foster home, agency, or institution | 18% | 10% | 10% | 6% | 14% | 6% |
| Employed a month before arrest | 70% | 76% | 68% | 76% | 69% | 76% |
| Experienced physical or sexual abuse in past | 27% | 10% | 17% | 6% | 24% | 8% |
| Have parent/guardian with substance abuse | 39% | 25% | 33% | 20% | 37% | 19% |
| Have substance dependence or abuse | 74% | 56% | 64% | 50% | 76% | 53% |
| Used drugs during offense | 38% | 26% | 31% | 23% | 34% | 20% |
| Had violent crime as most serious offense | 49% | 46% | 16% | 13% | 26% | 24% |
| Used weapon in offense | 37% | 37% | | | 21% | 21% |
| Mean maximum sentence length | 146 months | 141 months | 128 months | 135 months | 40 months | 45 months |
| Had 3 or more prior sentences | 47% | 39% | 35% | 30% | 42% | 33% |
| Received treatment after admission to facility | 34% | | 24% | | 18% | |
| Charged with rule violations in facility | 58% | 43% | 40% | 28% | 19% | 9% |