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Office of Justice Programs

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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS

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BJS FINDS INMATES HAVE HIGHER RATES OF SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS THAN THE U.S. GENERAL POPULATION

Female Inmates Had Higher Rates of Mental Health Indicators than Males

WASHINGTON — The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) released a study today that revealed 14 percent of state and federal prisoners and 26 percent of jail inmates reported experiences that met the threshold for serious psychological distress (SPD). In comparison, the BJS study found that one in 20 persons (5 percent) in the U.S. general population with similar sex, age, race and Hispanic origin characteristics met the threshold for SPD.

The data on the prison and jail inmates are from the BJS's 2011-12 National Inmate Survey and the general population data are from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The NSDUH data were standardized to match the sex, age, race and Hispanic origin of the prison and jail populations.

The report examined the prevalence of mental health problems among inmates based on two indicators: self-reported experiences that met the threshold for SPD in the 30 days prior to the survey and having been told at any time in the past by a mental health professional that they had a mental health disorder.

Among the incarcerated population, the study also found that females in state and federal prisons reported experiencing feelings that met the threshold for SPD at higher rates (20 percent) than males (14 percent). In jails, 32 percent of females and 26 percent of males met the threshold for SPD. Similar to the pattern for SPD, two-thirds of female inmates in both prisons (66 percent) and jails (68 percent) had been told by a mental health professional that they had a mental health disorder, compared to around a third (33 percent) of male prisoners and 41 percent of male jail inmates.

Thirty-seven percent of state and federal prisoners had been told by a mental health professional in the past that they had a mental health disorder. The most common disorder was a major depressive

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disorder (24 percent), followed by a bipolar disorder (18 percent), post-traumatic stress or personality disorder (13 percent) and schizophrenia or another psychotic disorder (9 percent).

Among jail inmates, 44 percent had been told in the past that they had a mental health disorder. Nearly a third had been told that they had major depressive disorder and a quarter had been told they had bipolar disorder.

Among inmates who met the threshold for SPD, more than half (54 percent) of prisoners and a third (35 percent) of jail inmates had received mental health treatment since admission to their current facility. About three-quarters of prisoners (74 percent) and jail inmates (73 percent) who met the threshold for SPD said they had received mental health treatment at some time in their life. Treatment included prescription medication, counseling or therapy, or both.

Other findings from the inmate survey—

- White prisoners (50 percent) were more likely than black prisoners (30 percent) to have been told they had a mental disorder.
- White jail inmates (57 percent) were more likely than black jail inmates (36 percent) or Hispanic jail inmates (31 percent) to have been told they had a mental disorder.
- Seventeen percent of state and federal prisoners incarcerated for a violent crime and 16 percent of those incarcerated for a property crime were more likely to have met the threshold for SPD than those incarcerated for DWI/DUI (14 percent), another public order offense (13 percent) or a drug crime (10 percent).
- Jail inmates incarcerated for a violent offense (29 percent) were more likely to have met the threshold for SPD than those incarcerated for a property crime (27 percent), another public order offense (26 percent), a drug crime (25 percent) or DWI/DUI (24 percent).
- Prisoners who met the threshold for SPD (14 percent) or who had been told they had a mental disorder (12 percent) were more likely to be written up or charged with a verbal or physical assault against a correctional officer, staff or another inmate than prisoners without an indicator of a mental health problem (4 percent).

The report, *Indicators of Mental Health Problems Reported by Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011-12* (NCJ 250612), was written by BJS statistician Jennifer Bronson and Marcus Berzofsky of RTI International. The report, related documents and additional information about BJS's statistical publications and programs can be found on the BJS website at www.bjs.gov.

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The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Acting Assistant Attorney General Alan R. Hanson, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six bureaus and offices: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART). More information about OJP and its components

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