

Evaluating the Opioid Epidemic in a Large County Jail and Determining Who Is Most at Risk

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Abstract : Objective: To explore the comorbidity of mental health conditions (major depressive disorder, borderline personality disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and schizophrenia) with opioid use disorder in people incarcerated at a large urban jail. Background Schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety are all serious mental health conditions that are highly prevalent amongst incarcerated patients. However, it is seldom the only disorder these patients are suffering from. According to the US Department of Justice, about half of US prisoners, both at the state and federal level, suffer from substance use disorders. Although the opioid epidemic has been studied greatly in the recent years amongst the general population, little has been explored on how the opioid crisis has affected incarcerated patients in local jails, particularly regarding which of these patients are most susceptible. Method The cohort consisted of 507 people incarcerated at a large county jail who were evaluated by mental health providers in December 2020. A retrospective review was performed to evaluate associations between mental health diagnoses, substance use disorder, and other demographic variables. Results Participants had been diagnosed with various mental health conditions, including MDD (22.6%, n = 115), GAD (33.7%, n = 171), Schizophrenia (15.2%, n = 77) and BPD (27%, n = 137). Preliminary Chi square tests were conducted for these conditions against marijuana, alcohol, cocaine, opioid, methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, and sedative use disorders. The results showed significant associations between Schizophrenia ($p = 0.013$), GAD ($p = 0.001$), and MDD ($p = 0.029$) with opioid use disorders. Conclusions Determining the extent of these comorbid substance use and mental health disorders within an incarcerated population can help influence treatment plans for future incarcerated patients. Many federal and state jail systems lack pharmacological substance use intervention and the prevalence of these co-morbid conditions can shed light on the importance of treating conditions concurrently upon intake.

Keywords : mental health conditions, opioids, substance use disorder, comorbidity

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