

Eliminating Health Disparities from the Inside Out

Kimberly Jacob Arriola, MPH, PhD

Assistant Professor

August 20, 2004

EMORY



ROLLINS
SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC
HEALTH

Today's Discussion



- Who are in US jails and prisons?
 - Demographics, criminal history
- What is the health status of inmates?
 - Why is it worse?
- Why should we care about inmates' health?
- What must be done to achieve health equality for inmates?

Characteristics of State Prison Inmates

- Gender: 93.4% male
- Race/ethnicity: 65% racial/ethnic minorities
- Age: 57% under age 35
- US Citizenship: 96% US citizens
- Educational attainment: 57% had HS diploma/GED
- Conviction offense:
 - 49% sentenced for a violent crime
 - 20% sentenced for a property crime
 - 21% sentenced for a drug crime

Characteristics of Jail Inmates

- Gender: 88% male
- Race/ethnicity: 61% racial/ethnic minorities
 - 40% Black, 19% Hispanic, 1% AI/AN, 1% A/PI
- Age: 62% under age 35
- US Citizenship: 92% US citizens
- Education: 43% had HS diploma/GED
- Most serious offense:
 - 25% charged with violent offenses
 - 24% charged with property offenses
 - 25% charged with drug offenses
 - 25% charged with public-order offenses

Characteristics of Jail Inmates

- Criminal history:
 - 38% had no previous sentence
 - 28% violent recidivists
 - 34% nonviolent recidivists
- Substance use and treatment:
 - 66% drank alcohol regularly
 - 69% used any drug regularly
 - 58% of those who used regularly had been in TX
- Employment: 71% employed in the month before arrest
- Family background: 46% had family member who had ever been incarcerated

Who are in US Jails & Prisons?

- Individuals with:
 - Limited access to healthcare
 - Lack of social support
 - Limited financial resources
 - Lack of political power
 - Limited life options

What is the Health Status of Inmates?

- Speech & vision impairments (state inmates)
 - Rates of speech disabilities and impaired vision are 2 to 3 times that of the general pop
- Violence/injuries
 - 28% of state/federal inmates injured since admission
- Infectious diseases
 - Tuberculosis: 32/100,000 in GA state prisons compared to 12/100,000 in GA general pop
 - Hepatitis C: 30-40% of inmates are estimated to be infected
 - HIV/AIDS: Confirmed AIDS case rate (.49%) is 3x that of the general population (.14%)

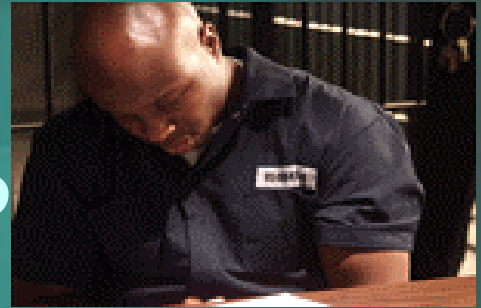
What is the Health Status of Inmates?

- Mental illness
 - 10% of jail and prison inmates self-report having an emotional condition
 - 10% of state prison and jail detainees report having an overnight stay in a mental hospital (5% federal prison inmates)
 - 16% of state prison and jail detainees are estimated to be mentally ill (7% federal prison inmates)
 - 69% of jail inmates report regular drug use
 - Marijuana, Cocaine/crack, Hallucinogens, Stimulants
 - 57% of state prisoners & 45% of federal prisoners used drugs in the month before offense

Why is it Worse than Adults in the General Population?

- Some of the behaviors that lead to incarceration also confer health risk
 - Illicit drug use and addiction
 - Commercial sex work
- Financial barriers: Unemployment, lack of health benefits, lack of access to care, poverty, homelessness
- Underutilization of health services due to distrust of the medical establishment
- Lack of prevention services in the communities from which many inmates come

Why Should We Care?



- They're health is suffering
 - Mission of PH is to "Fulfill society's interest in assuring conditions in which people can be healthy"
- They're coming out!
 - About 600,000 state prison inmates released annually
 - 95% of state prison inmates will be released
- They have a right to healthcare
 - Incarcerated persons have an 8th amendment right to medical care
- They are our friends & family

What Must be Done?

- Change negative sentiment towards inmate population
 - Stigma & discrimination faced by inmates
 - Society, CO's, medical staff, CBO staff
- Foster collaborations among Public Health departments, correctional agencies, and community based organizations
- Broaden health promotion efforts
 - Increase counseling & testing
 - Increase health education for adults & juveniles
 - Increase condom availability

What Must be Done?

- Improve services for female inmates
 - Reproductive health services
 - Substance abuse treatment services
 - Mental health services (high rates of violence/abuse)
- Increase pre-release healthcare planning
 - Link inmates with health services prior to release

What Is Being Done?

- Corrections Demonstration Project
 - 5-year project
 - Funded by CDC and HRSA
 - 7 health departments funded to implement new services to HIV-infected inmates transitioning to the community
 - 1 Evaluation & Program Support Center Funded to oversee multi-site evaluation

Conclusions



- Any effort to achieve equitable access to health care **MUST** consider correctional populations.
- Their health is among the poorest in the nation
- Barriers to their improved health are many...
- But no barrier is insurmountable....we just have to care enough!