

The Impact of Incarceration on Women's Mental Health

Responses From Women in a Maximum-Security Prison

Holly M. Harner¹

Suzanne Riley¹

¹La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Holly M. Harner, La Salle University, School of Nursing and Health Sciences, St. Benilde Tower, Office 3339, La Salle University, 1900 W. Olney Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19141, USA Email: harner@lasalle.edu

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Abstract

Many women enter prison with significant mental health conditions. Without appropriate intervention during incarceration, there is the potential for these conditions to worsen during confinement. As a result, women, most of whom will eventually be released from prison, might return to their families and communities with even more complex mental health needs. We examined women's perceptions of how incarceration had affected their mental health. Our study approach included descriptive surveys and focus groups with women in prison. Our analysis revealed that women's mental health might worsen, might improve, or might remain the same as a result of incarceration. Women's accounts also provide evidence to support the need for all women's correctional institutions to adopt a trauma-informed approach to care of this vulnerable population.