

Mental illness and suicide in juvenile detention facilities

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Mental Illness and Suicide in Juvenile Detention Facilities Mental Illness and Suicide in Juvenile Detention Facilities The United States Surgeon General has noted that youth suicide is a major problem across the country, and indeed a public health problem that deserves serious attention (U. S. Department of Justice, 2009). Between 1995 and 1999, there were about 110 reported suicide cases in the U. S. Over two-thirds of the suicide victims are Caucasian while about 40% and 18% of the victims are of Hispanic and African-American decent respectively (U. S. Department of Justice, 2009). American Indian youths and Caucasian youths accounted for 2% and 38% of the victims respectively, according to a survey conducted in 1992 (U. S. Department of Justice, 2009).

A study conducted in California revealed that close to 32 percent of detained male juveniles had post-traumatic stress disorder (Hayes, 2009). The study also found that these youths experienced high levels of distress, depression and anxiety while exhibiting lower degrees of impulse control, restraint, and suppression of aggression (Hayes, 2009). Another study conducted in Mississippi established that at least 66 percent of detained juveniles had mental disorders, with more than half suffering from multiple mental disorders such as substance abuse and conduct disorders (Hayes, 2009). Through the study, Hayes (2009) noticed that 60 percent of the youths detained in juvenile correction centers in Virginia had mental health treatment needs. This situation was similar in Georgia where it was reported that about 61 percent of the juveniles in correction centers had mental problems (Samaha, 2005).

The following are the statistics related to the disorders that U. S. youths in

juvenile detention facilities experience. Between 50% and 90 % experience conduct disorders, 46 % attention disorders, 6-41 % anxiety disorders, 25-50 % substance abuse, 32-78 % affective disorder, 1-6 % psychotic disorders, and 50 % co-occurring mental disorder and substance abuse disorders.

These statistics show that the juveniles exhibit signs of conduct disorder.

This disorder is characterized by aggressive physical conduct aimed at injuring others and non-aggressive conducts aimed at causing damage to properties, theft, violation of rules and deceit (Hayes, 2009).

Hayes (2009) also notes that juveniles in detention show high rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse than their counterparts in the community. According to a past study, juveniles in Maryland were associated with high rates of physical violence which stood at 35 percent, and sexual abuse at 18 percent (Hays, 2009).

Hayes (2009) asserts that suicide is a leading cause of deaths in jails throughout the US. In fact, it ranks third after natural causes and HIV and AIDS. Statistics also reveal that suicide and attempted suicide are common in juvenile facilities. A study conducted in the past has showed that more than 11, 000 juvenile engage in more than 17, 000 incidences of suicidal behavior within the juvenile facility every year (Hayes, 2009). Another study conducted by the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System research in 1991 featuring more than 1, 800 juveniles in the US revealed than 22 percent considered suicide, 20 percent had a plan to commit suicide, 16 percent had at one time or another attempted suicide, and 8 percent was injured in the process of attempting suicide (Hayes, 2009). Suicidal behaviors in male juvenile are associated with depression

and major life events, past suicidal attempt, and poor social connection while those in females were found to be associated with instability, depression, impulsiveness and young age (Hayes, 2009).

References

Hayes, L. M. (2009). *Juvenile Suicide in Confinement: A National Survey*. Washington, DC: DIANE publishing.

Samaha, J. (2005). *Criminal Justice*. New York: Cengage Learning.

U. S. Department of Justice (2009) *Characteristics of Juvenile Suicide in Confinement*. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/214434.pdf>