

An Analysis of Self-Reported Suicide Attempts and Ideation in a National Sample of Incarcerated Individuals Convicted of Sexual Crimes

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Introduction

- Suicide is a leading cause of preventable death in US jails and prisons, with rates three to nine times higher than those of the general population (Hall & Gabor, 2004; Snow, Paton, Oram, & Teers, 2002)
- From 2013 to 2014, the number of suicides in state prisons increased by 30% (Noonan, 2016)
- Prisoners charged or convicted of sexual crimes are over-represented among inmates who died by suicide compared with the general prison population, as they may have more risk factors for suicide (Bogue & Power, 1995; Brophy, 2003)
- Individuals convicted of sexual crimes were found to report elevated rates of hopelessness and depressive mood, which are among predictors of suicidal behavior, and approximately 14% of them have reported a suicide attempt at some point in their lives (Jeglic, Mercado, & Levenson, 2012; Jeglic, Spada, & Mercado, 2013)
- Previous suicide attempts and ideation significantly increase future risk of completed suicide (Fazel, Cartwright, Normal-Nott, & Hawton, 2008)
- Past research regarding suicidal behavior in individuals who sexually offended was based upon official reports that may be underestimating the true prevalence of the phenomenon
- The current study investigates self-reported suicidal thoughts and behaviors in a large national sample of incarcerated individuals convicted of a sexually-based crime

Aims

The aims of the present study were:

- 1) To analyze the prevalence of self-reported suicidal behavior in a national sample of offenders convicted of sex crimes
- 2) To examine how characteristics of the offenders are related to suicidal behavior
- 3) To contribute to predictive models of suicidal behavior among individuals incarcerated for a sexually-based crime

Methods

- This study employed a cross-sectional design using publicly available archival records of the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities
- Computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI) were conducted starting October 2003 through May 2004 (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004)
- Suicidal behavior was assessed through two mutually exclusive questions in the mental health section: (1) “Have you ever attempted suicide?”; (2) “Have you ever considered suicide?”
- In total, 1,118 male offenders were identified for study’s purposes, aged 18 to 81 with mean age of 41.53 (*SD* = 11.94)
 - White, never married or divorced
 - 56.7% had children
 - 36.9% had high school diploma, 6.3% had GED, 16% attended college, 2.9% attended graduate school
 - 83% were employed in the month before the arrest
 - 90.4% were not habitual offenders
 - 30.4% reported being diagnosed with a mental disorder, 28.9% received medication, 15.8% were hospitalized
 - 80.9% had one victim who was known to the offender in most cases (84.1%)

Results

Table 1. Significant characteristics related to suicidal behavior.

Lifetime suicide attempt (17.9%, n = 200)	Lifetime suicidal ideation (15.1%, n = 169)
White**	White**
Under the age of 31**	Divorced*
Known victim (one)*	History of sexual abuse**
Foster home (primary)*	History of physical abuse**
Lifetime foster care**	Caretakers abused substances**
History of sexual abuse**	Psychiatric diagnosis**
History of physical abuse**	Psychiatric treatment**
Caretakers abused substances**	Impact of mental disorder**
Intentional injury in prison**	Learning disability*
Psychiatric diagnosis**	
Psychiatric treatment**	
Impact of mental disorder**	
Learning disability**	
Special education class**	

*p<.05. **p<.01

Results

- In order to better understand the predictors of suicide attempts and ideation, a hierarchical logistic regression was performed
- The final model predicting likelihood of suicide attempts ($\chi^2 = 216.262$, *df* = 7, *p* < .01) explained 30.7% of the variance
 - Significant predictors included
 - ❖ A history of at least one type of psychiatric treatment
 - ❖ Impact of mental disorder
 - ❖ A history of physical abuse
 - ❖ Lifetime foster care system involvement
- The final model predicting likelihood of suicidal ideation ($\chi^2 = 121.546$, *df* = 7, *p* < .01) explained 21.1% of the variance
 - Significant predictors included
 - ❖ A history of mental health diagnosis
 - ❖ A history of at least one type of psychiatric treatment
 - ❖ A history of physical abuse

Discussion

- Clinical implications
 - Intake process
 - ❖ Evidence-based suicide risk assessment tools
 - A history of abuse
 - Foster care system involvement
 - Psychiatric history
 - Past suicide attempts
 - Suicidal ideation
 - During incarceration
 - ❖ Proper protection for offenders incarcerated for sexual crimes that does not include segregation
 - Preparing for release
 - ❖ Teaching strategies for coping with reintegration and legislative barriers
 - ❖ Trauma-informed care as a treatment of choice