Inmate Suicide (2014)

Statistics:

- Suicide is the leading cause of preventable death in U.S. jails, comprising 29% or more of all deaths (Way et. al, 2005, Clarke, n.d.).

- Suicide rates in correctional facilities are 3 to 9 times higher than outside of them (Hall & Garbor, 2004; Hayes, 1997; Tartaro & Lester, 2005).

- Local jails often have higher rates of suicide than large jails and state or federal prisons (Clarke, n.d.; Mumola, 2005; Tartaro & Lester, 2005; Tripoti & Bender, 2007).

Risk factors unique to the incarcerated:

- Isolation, loss of control, shame, and fear that are part of life in jail (Tripoti & Bender, 2007)

- Offenders are also significantly more likely to have pre-existing dispositions, including:
  I. Aggressive and impulsive tendencies,
  II. Psychological disorders,
  III. Substance abuse problems,
  IV. Previous attempt history (Tripoti & Bender, 2007; Way et. al, 2005).
  V. More likely to engage in non-suicidal self-injurious behavior including cutting, head banging, and the ingestion of foreign objects and substances

- 86% of inmates who die by suicide have engaged in self-injurious behavior prior to their death (Cox, 2003)

The most comprehensive standards for correctional facilities to follow in order to reduce suicide have been laid out by the National Commission on Correctional Healthcare (Tripodi & Bender, 2007):

1. Identification – Screening forms using observations and interviews to assess suicide risk
2. Training – All staff trained to recognize cues of suicide risk
3. Assessment – Mental health worker conducts thorough assessment and assigns risk level
4. Monitoring – Specify procedures for regular monitoring of prisoners at risk
5. Housing – Avoid isolation unless constant observation is possible; house with other inmates in safe environment with 10- to 15-min checks
6. Referral – Refer potentially suicidal prisoners to mental health providers
7. Communication – Procedures for constant communication between mental health provider and corrections staff
8. Intervention – Immediate intervention procedures for stopping a suicide in progress
9. Notification – Procedures for notifying authorities and family members of suicide attempts or completions
10. Reporting – Careful documentation of screening, monitoring efforts, and suicide attempts or completions
11. Review – Plan for review by prison administrators and medical professionals if suicide occurs
MOST AT-RISK POPULATIONS:

The majority of inmates that die by suicide are:

- White
  (White & Schimmel, 1995)

- African American inmates have significantly lowest rates
  (Way et. al, 2005).

- Younger than average age of the prison or jail population
  (Way et. al, 2005).

More at risk:

- Those who have recently been sentenced or incarcerated
  (Correia, 2000; Hayes, 1995; Lester, 1987)

- Those who have been dealt longer sentences
  (Correia, 2000; Hayes, 1995; Lester, 1987)

- Those facing new legal problems or inmate-related conflicts
  (White & Schimmel, 1995)

References:


Clarke, M. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/(S(g0zwk0jou1x4vz45tgqzpf45))/displayArticle.aspx?articleid=22841&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1


