

Mental Health and Suicidal Ideation among People Incarcerated with HIV in Namibia

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INTRODUCTION: The protection and promotion of human rights are vital in preventing the spread and mitigating the impacts of HIV worldwide. Incarceration is also widely accepted as being a human rights issue, partly due to health inequities faced by incarcerated individuals. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is said to be the epicenter of the HIV epidemic. Despite the prevalence of HIV among prison populations in SSA research related to this population, especially in Namibia, is quite limited. Emerging research suggests that for incarcerated individuals living with HIV, issues related to mental health are likely exacerbated.

PURPOSE: To date, no studies have examined the impacts of mental health issues on suicidality among incarcerated individuals living with HIV in Namibia, Africa. Thus, the current study aimed to fill this gap.

METHODS: This cross-sectional study utilized a purposive sampling method to survey 154 incarcerated adults living with HIV in Namibia. We tested three hypotheses: (H1) Higher levels of PTSD will be associated with an increase in suicidality; (H2) Higher levels of depressive symptoms will be related to an increase in suicidality; and (H3) Individuals with a history of mental health issues prior to incarceration will be related to an increase in suicidality.

RESULTS: Supportive of H1, a logistic multivariate regression models revealed that higher levels of PTSD were significantly associated with higher levels of suicidality. And supportive of H2, higher levels of depressive symptoms were significantly related to higher levels of suicidality. There was no support found for H3. Additionally, we found unmarried prisoners were more likely to report suicidal ideation than prisoners with other marital statuses and male prisoners were more likely to report suicidal ideation than female prisoners.

CONCLUSION: These findings call for culturally appropriate interventions to support this population in improving mental health and are especially important given that social workers in Namibia are increasingly being called to work with individuals living with HIV.