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Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional
Facilities: A Qualitative Study**

A Thesis Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Upper Division Honors

Department Of

Nursing

By

Katrina Zubi

DeKalb, Illinois

May 13, 2017

University Honors Program

Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type)
Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A
Qualitative Study

Student Name: Katrina Zubi

Faculty Supervisor: Kari Hickey

Faculty Approval Signature Kari Hickey

Department of Nursing

Date of Approval (print or type) 5.03.2017

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

An estimated forty percent of jail inmates suffer from chronic health problems. It is important to know what kinds of issues the corrections population faces most commonly. My project looks at the perceptions of nurses who work at a county jail in rural Indiana to see what they view as the most common inmate health problems. It also looks at literature relating to the topic, and compares the results of the two sources of information. I used a seven-question qualitative survey to ask the nurses about what they viewed as the most common problems they saw. I found that both sources mentioned chronic illness and substance use as important issues, but only the literature mentioned serious mental illness and sexually transmitted infections, while only the survey mentioned seizures, insomnia, headaches, toothaches, and urinary tract infections.

**HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT
THESIS SUBMISSION FORM**

AUTHOR: Katrina Zubi

THESIS TITLE: Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in
Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study

ADVISOR: Dr. Kari Hickey

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ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study

Overview

The health of jail and prison inmates is an important yet often overlooked issue. Jail and prison inmates are more likely than the general population to use medication, have chronic illnesses, and have infectious diseases. The methods used for this study will include a literature review as well as an internet based survey using Qualtrics. For the literature review portion, previously published statistics and articles will be examined. The survey will be qualitative in design and will use nurses who work in correctional facilities as the primary sources. Participants will be asked for demographic information in addition to the questions about perceived inmate health problems. The data gathered in the survey will be analyzed by the student and the professor for common themes. The information found in the literature review will then be compared to the information gathered during the survey (Appendix A). Results will be presented in a poster during Nursing Honors Poster Day Spring 2017 and at the American Psychiatric Nurses Association's annual conference in Phoenix, AZ.

Literature Review

When looking at the literature that corresponded with my study, I found several main themes related to jail inmate health. I found that persons with severe mental illness in jails have increased rates of chronic illness compared to the general population, and also that incarcerated persons have very high rates of chronic illness compared to the general population (General medical problems). I also found that the number of jail or prison inmates with mental illness is disproportionately large (Comorbid mental illness). Another important thing I found was that many jail inmates come from low resource

communities and have increased rates of unemployment, lack of health care, and lack of stable housing. Because of this, jail may be some inmates only source of health care. Conditions like tuberculosis and HIV are frequently diagnosed after routine screenings in jails (Jails as public health partners). Another reason problems may be diagnosed in jails is that inmates have the opportunity to feel pain or other symptoms that may have been masked or diminished by substance use (Prisoners perspectives). Jail inmates have high rates of chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, hypertension, HIV, tuberculosis, hepatitis, and mental illness. Also, approximately 65% of jail inmates need treatment for a substance use disorder (The critical link).

Survey

To make and distribute my survey, I first had to get approval from the IRB at Northern Illinois University. Then, I contacted the nursing director at the jail I wanted to work with. She agreed to distribute the survey to her employees. Dr. Hickey and I sent out a recruitment letter (Appendix B) along with our seven-question qualitative survey (Appendix C). We had a 100% response rate from the nurses that the survey was distributed to.

When looking at the responses, it was easy to see some common themes. Substance use and addiction were mentioned by almost 100% of responders. Other common problems mentioned by the nurses included urinary tract infection, headache, toothache, insomnia, and seizures.

When comparing the results of the literature review and the survey, we found that substance use and chronic conditions (MRSA, hypertension, diabetes, asthma, chronic pain) were identified as important problems by the nurses and the literature. Only the

literature mentioned tuberculosis, HIV, sexually transmitted infections, and serious mental illness. Only the survey results included headache, toothache, insomnia, seizures, and urinary tract infections.

Because only six nurses were surveyed for this project, it should be repeated on a larger scale that includes more diverse locations.

After finishing the survey, I made my poster (Appendix D) and applied for it to be presented at the APNA conference, where it was accepted to be presented in poster form. I also presented it at the School of Nursing Honors Poster Day.

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Appendix A: Proposal

Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study

Objective

My honors capstone project will focus on health problems that are common among prisoners. I will be looking at research that has been done on this topic as well as surveying nurses who work in correctional facilities to see what their perceptions of the most prevalent health problems are. It is important to know what kinds of issues the corrections population faces. Many times, incarcerated persons are diagnosed with physical or mental health problems after receiving care from a health care provider in the corrections system. Because of this, health problems can be more apparent in correctional facilities than they are in the community.

Methodology

The methods used for this study will include a literature review as well as an internet based survey using Qualtrics. For the literature review portion, previously published statistics and articles will be examined. The survey will be qualitative in design and will use nurses who work in correctional facilities as the primary sources. Participants will be asked for demographic information in addition to the questions about perceived inmate health problems. The data gathered in the survey will be analyzed by the student and the professor for common themes. The information found in the literature review will then be compared to the information gathered during the survey. Results will be presented in a poster during Nursing Honors Poster Day Spring 2017.

Supporting References

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Outline

Submit IRB paperwork: Jan 25

Send out survey: Feb 24

Rough Draft: due April 1

Honors Poster day: TBA

Qualifications

My qualifications for this project include several lecture based courses as well as clinical courses. I have taken University 105, which is a course about library resources and research, as well as nursing research, which was centered around research in the field of nursing. Other relevant courses include lectures and clinical courses in population focused nursing, mental health nursing, and medical surgical nursing. Dr. Hickey has completed two research studies with jail inmate perceptions of health.

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Recruitment Email

Hello,

Our names are Dr. Kari Hickey (School of Nursing faculty, Northern Illinois University) and Katrina Zubi (senior nursing student, Northern Illinois University) and we would like to request your participation in a research study we are conducting titled “Nurses’ Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study.” It is important to note that Dr. Hickey and Ms. Zubi are affiliated with the School of Nursing at Northern Illinois University. Participating or not participating in this research study has no effect on your employment.

The goal of this project is to gather information about what health problems nurses in correctional facilities see inmates for most frequently. We are surveying a group of experts in the field of correctional nursing to learn about health issues affecting inmates. Information from this study will be compared and contrasted to previous research as part of Ms. Zubi’s Honors Project..

If you agree to participate, there is a web link at the bottom of this page that will take you to the confidential survey. We anticipate the survey will take no longer than 15-20 minutes of your time. If you agree to participate in the research you will be asked to give consent on the first page of the Qualtrics web based survey. **Your completion of this survey demonstrates your consent to participate in this research project.** Results from the survey will be kept on a password-protected computer in a locked office.

There is no immediate benefit to you; however, data collected will help to better understand health issues suffered by jail inmates.

There are no anticipated risks to participate in the study. If there are any concerns during the survey, Dr. Hickey will be available by phone or email to offer you support.

Your participation in the study is purely voluntary. You may withdraw from participation at any time with no penalty. If you wish further information regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at Northern Illinois University at 815-753-8588.

Please consider participating! If you have any questions you can reach Dr. Hickey by phone at 815-753-0666; or by email at khickey1@niu.edu.

Please click the link below if you would like to participate in this research study.

Thank you!

Dr. Hickey and Katrina Zubi
Northern Illinois University
School of Nursing and Health Studies
1240 Normal Road
DeKalb, Illinois 60115

Appendix C: Survey Questions

What is your age?

What is your gender?

Please specify your race/ ethnicity:

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Black or African American

Latino or Hispanic

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

White

How long have you been working as a nurse?

How long have you worked in the corrections specialty?

What are the most common health problems you see in inmates?

What inmate health problems do you think are most important to address while incarcerated?

Appendix D: Poster



Northern Illinois
University

Nurses' Perceptions of Inmate Health Problems in Correctional Facilities: A Qualitative Study

Katrina Zubi, SN & Kari Hickey, PhD, RN

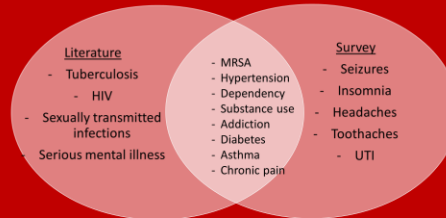
Objectives:

1. To understand common health problems experienced by jail inmates as reported in a survey of corrections nurses
2. To understand the common health problems experienced by jail inmates as found in a literature review
3. To be able to compare the survey results to the results of the literature review

Method:

This study included a literature review as well as a survey portion. The survey was qualitative in design and used nurses who work in correctional facilities as the primary sources.

What are the most common inmate health problems you see in your line of work?
Which inmate health problems do you think are most important to address while incarcerated?



Survey Questions:

What is your age?
What is your gender?
Please specify your ethnicity:
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Latino or Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific islander
- White or Caucasian
- Other
How many years have you been working as a nurse?
How many years have you been working in the field of corrections?
What are the most common inmate health problems you see in your line of work?
Which inmate health problems do you think are most important to address while incarcerated?

Theoretical framework:

This study used the Social-Ecological Model as a framework to better understand the problem of jail inmate health issues.

Conclusions:

- Only the literature mentioned HIV, TB, STIs, and SMI
- Only the survey mentioned seizures, insomnia, UTI, headaches, and toothaches
- Both identified chronic conditions and substance use as important themes

Future Implications:

Because only 6 nurses were surveyed for this study, it should be repeated on a larger scale in the future. It should also be repeated in alternate settings since the nurses in this study worked in a rural Indiana setting.