CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mental disorders in the jail and prison system is a prevalent issue that has not made much progress in remand prison systems. Jails are temporary detention centers which are typically operated by counties or municipalities where inmates wait for verdict on pending crimes. Prisons are more long-term facilities operated by the state which house inmates with more intense crimes. A study done in the 1980’s showed that thirty-seven percent of sentenced prisoners had a mental disorder while the remand prison rate was likely higher. (Powell, Holt & Fondacaro, 1997) Inmates and advocacy groups began filing lawsuits to require states and countries to increase the services being provided for mentally ill prisoners. In addition, they requested that the conditions of services be improved as well. (Powell, Holt & Fondacaro, 1997) Research has not yet identified the causes of these mental disorders being that it may vary depending on each institution, the types of mental disorders are consistent. The types of mental disorders vary from schizophrenia, major affective disorder, anxiety disorders, alcohol dependence, anxiety disorder, and alcohol and drug dependence. (Powell, Holt & Fondacaro, 1997)

Problem Statement

There is a major need for this study due to the increasing rate of inmates in the jail and prison systems who are in need of mental health services. This issue has been prevalent for over two decades, and still needs to be evaluated. Major mental disorders have been shown to be significantly higher for those that are offenders versus those that aren’t. Jails often receive more services such as case management, mental health referrals, and crisis intervention services as opposed to prison systems. In addition, being that offenders are in jails for much shorter time than those in prisons, the results can’t always be compared. The lengthy amount of time that offenders spend in prisons could contribute to the severity of their mental disorder(s). The population affected by this problem are adults 18 and over, any gender, and who has experienced mental illness disorders while in prison. In addition to these factors, research shows that a prisoner’s location doesn’t make a difference in their mental health. (Powell, Holt & Fondacaro, 1997)

This research study examined whether or not mental health disorders would be worse in prisons in urban areas rather than rural areas, and results showed that there isn’t a significant difference. The problem that will be proposed in this research is the lack of adequate resources for those suffering with mental illnesses in the jail and prison systems. According to the research, the mental illness rate is rising in the prison system which means that it is imperative to provide effective treatment for inmates.

Research Question and Hypothesis

The purpose of the study will be to examine the mental health treatments for inmates in jail and prison systems, on a national level. In addition to treatments, how the environment of prison systems can affect inmate’s mental health is also in question. The first research question proposed is are there effective mental health treatment and psychotherapy for inmates in the jail and prison systems? It is hypothesized that there are not effective mental health treatment and psychotherapy to treat individuals in the jail and prison system. The second research question, does the jail and prison environments influence mental health disorders in inmates? The hypothesis for this research question is that the prison environment directly correlates with a decline in mental health. These research questions are imperative in achieving the general purpose for many reasons. First, there is not much research on the mental health disorders in the prison and jail system. The existing research is dating back to at least 10 years ago. Being that there is very limited research would provoke one to think that not much change is being made for prisoners. Secondly, these research questions are necessary for the general purpose being that they can educate policy makers and advocates in order to improve the mental health services within the prison systems. (Nurse, Woodcock, & Ormsby, 2003) Lastly, it is important to understand which parts of the jail and prison environment is being related to inmate’s mental health disorders. Bullying, bad relationships with other inmates, lack of mental stimulation, etc. can contribute to mental disorders. (Nurse, Woodcock, & Ormsby, 2003)

Significance of the Study

This study can contribute to academia and social work practice directly being that a layer of social work practice is mental health workers such as LCSW’s, CPS’s, therapists, etc. All of these professionals could have the opportunity to work within a prison system which means that this research would directly affect their practices. LCSW’s in particular are licensed to diagnose individuals which would be immensely important in this research study. LCSW’s could be the ones to work in the experiment of the study to determine if a prisoner has a mental health diagnosis as well as the severity of it. This is extremely important being that prisoners cannot receive adequate help if a problem has not been identified. According to research, twenty percent of inmates had a mental health disorder going into prison, and that disorder was not identified which greatly lessened the opportunity for them to receive treatment. In addition, failure to provide treatment for inmates may lead to high suicide rates for those untreated inmates. (Birmingham, Mason, Grubin, 1996) CPS’s and therapists could work with the prisoners on treatment plans and they could be a resource for the improvement of mental health services in the prison system. So, the results from this study could provide these professionals with a guide on how to assist in the prison system. This study can also benefit social work policy and practice because it can bring awareness to the lack of mental health assistance in the prison system. Advocates can begin to implement policies that would be of assistance to inmates with mental health disorders.

New findings of this study can add to this existing literature by exploring different populations. This research would consider a smaller population, but it would consider many more factors such as age, gender, pre-existing disorders and self-reported family history. These additional factors may provide more insight on the results from existing literature. Being that none of the articles mentioned in this paper thus far have mentioned these different demographics, this study can help to examine a more accurate correlation between jail and prison systems and inmate’s mental health. New findings can also contribute to existing research by examining which mental health treatments are being provided to the inmates besides substance abuse counseling and crisis intervention. It is possible that prisons are providing a number of treatments, but they may not be providing the most effective ones. Two of the main factors of inmates becoming mentally ill are isolation and lack of mental stimulation.

This study could also work to determine if the results may be generalizable to people who experience these symptoms outside of the prison system. Some children grow up in dysfunctional families where they are forced to be isolated as well as restricted from learning. This study could help provide insight if mental health disorders may have the same effect on them.