Clinician Perspectives for Mental Health Delivery Following COVID-19 in Carceral Settings: A Pilot Study

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Introduction

• Strong evidence of disproportionate mental health crisis in carceral settings during the COVID-19 pandemic
• Public health measures exacerbated mental health burden while diminished in-person care
• Surveyed healthcare providers on perceptions of telehealth delivery for mental health therapy in correctional settings
• Insights can further the understanding on the importance and efficacy of telehealth in providing for underserved communities and addressing the growing mental health crisis

Methods

Survey: Questionnaire adopted from validated study on telehealth services for veterans. Distributed to clinicians through the American College of Correctional Physicians listserv in November of 2022. Survey contained structured questions and qualitative free response, assessing various facets of telehealth delivery during the pandemic. Participation encouraged through gift card. A total of 55 individuals responded to the study, and the results were tabulated. Funding was provided by the New York County Psychiatric Society grant.

Results

Table 1. Summary of Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenge ranges by aspects of the tele-delivery of mental healthcare in carceral settings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes (%)</th>
<th>No (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did mental health care change during COVID-19?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telehealth is ineffective in promoting a sound therapeutic relationship jeopardizing compliance and patient trust.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The difficulties providing adequate care for any medical problem within the carceral environment are overwhelming.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With the appropriate set up telehealth for mental healthcare has the potential to dramatically increase access to mental healthcare.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

• Respondents find telehealth to be of slightly lower quality than in-person care
• Technical, bureaucratic, rapport issues persist
• Concerns telehealth only covers for significant staffing shortages
• Relief of inevitable growth and adaptation of telehealth over time in carceral settings
• Blend telepsychiatry and on-site resources

Limitations

• Small sample size (n=55) with potential for non-response bias dependent on survey engagement

Future Studies

• Technical investigation of best practices of mental healthcare in carceral settings to capitalize on best practices of in-person and telehealth care

References