

Contact with mental health services after medically verified self-harm: A prospective data linkage study

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Introduction

High rates of self-harm resulting in acute health service contact have been observed in adults released from prison. Contact with health services due to self-harm is a key intervention opportunity to prevent deleterious health outcomes. Little is known about subsequent mental health service contact after discharge from acute health services.

Objectives and Approach

We aimed to describe mental health service contact after discharge from acute health service contacts following self-harm in a representative sample of adults released from prison. Ambulance, emergency department (ED), hospital inpatient and ambulatory mental health service records were probabilistically linked to pre-release interview data. Self-harm events after release were identified from ICD codes and coded from case notes in ambulance, ED, and hospital records. We calculated the time between discharge from ambulance, ED, or hospital after self-harm and subsequent contact with mental health services. Factors predicting the likelihood of mental health service contact were examined using multivariate logistic regression.

Results

Of 1307 adults released from prison, 108 (8.3%) experienced 218 self-harm events resulting in acute health service use in the community. Of these presentations, 0%, 59%, and 50% of discharges from ambulance attendances, ED and hospital, respectively, had subsequent contact with a specialist mental health service within 7 days of that acute service contact. Mental health service contact within 7 days of acute service contact was positively associated with being female (adjusted odds ratio [AOR]: 3.27; 95%CI: 1.26-8.47) and being identified by prison staff as at risk for self-harm (AOR: 3.34; 95%CI: 1.29-8.62), and was negatively associated with dual diagnosis (AOR: 0.19; 95%CI: 0.06-0.61), substance use disorder only (AOR: 0.13; 95%CI: 0.04-0.48) and physical health functioning (AOR: 0.96; 95%CI: 0.92-0.99).

Conclusion/Implications

Almost half of adults with a recent history of incarceration discharged from acute health service after self-harm did not receive timely specialist mental health care. Improved integration of acute health services and ambulatory mental health services could improve outcomes for adults who present with self-harm.

