The Intersections of Trauma, Serious Mental Illness, and Offending among Women in Jail

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This presentation is based on a multi-site study funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance on "Women's Pathways to Jail," for which the author was an investigator along with Shannon Lynch (Principal Investigator), Dana DeHart (Co-Investigator), and Bonnie Green (Investigator). To examine the onset of trauma, serious mental illness (SMI), and offending, one-one-one interviews with almost 500 women in U.S. jails, we found that 32% of the women met criteria for SMI in the prior year 42% met this criteria for some point in their life. Among these jailed women, SMI was related not only to more extensive offending and a greater likelihood of violent offending, but also more extensive victimization histories. SMI was also indicated as a risk factor for the onset of running away (as youth), substance use, and drug and property crimes. Jailed women who were survivors of intimate partner abuse were more likely to have done sex work and to have drug charges. Other findings will be reported in this presentation.