



Sex differences in traumatic events and psychiatric morbidity associated to probable posttraumatic stress disorder among Latino prisoners

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ABSTRACT

Latinos comprised 17.1% of the U.S. population and 33.1% of US prisoners, yet they are underrepresented in the psychopathology literature. Despite higher rates of trauma among incarcerated individuals than in the general population, most of the previous research in this area focused primarily on women samples, and very few studies examined sex differences in PTSD and traumatic experiences. In addition, there is a need for research assessing traumatic experiences and probable PTSD in men and women Latino inmates to inform culturally competent care and sex sensitive care for this vulnerable and underserved population. Our study examined whether men and women Latino inmates with probable Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), based on the cut off 40 or more symptoms on the Davidson Trauma Scale (DTS), differed significantly by the number of event types experienced, the type of potentially traumatizing event, and in co-occurring psychiatric conditions. A multi-stage sample design was used to select a probabilistic sample of 1,331 inmates from 26 penal institutions in PR of which 1179 participated in the study. Bivariate associations were calculated for each type of traumatic event and probable PTSD. Mean number of types of potentially traumatizing event experienced was comparable for both sexes ($F = 3.83$, $M = 3.74$) yet sex differences were found in the nature of the event. Women with probable PTSD had higher rates of experiencing rape and sexual abuse. Men had higher rates of experiencing combat in war, a life-threatening accident, of witnessing violence, and being threatened with a weapon. Men with significant ADHD symptoms in childhood and with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) during adulthood were almost 5 and 7 times as likely to score above threshold on the DTS whereas women were >3 times as likely in the presence of ADHD symptoms in childhood or depression during adulthood. This study underscores the need to improve understanding of the clinical manifestations of trauma and co-occurring psychiatric conditions for appropriate sex sensitive interventions targeting Latinos living in prisons.

1. Introduction

Compared to the general population, incarcerated individuals demonstrate significantly higher rates of traumatic exposure (Green et al., 2005; Grella et al., 2005). It has been estimated that over 75% of incarcerated individuals are exposed to a substantial number of traumatic events during their lifetimes (Boşgelmez et al., 2010; Huang et al., 2006; Kubiak, 2004a,2004b). One study reported a mean of 8.1 traumatic events among inmates (Payne et al., 2008). Three primary factors may account for the higher prevalence of traumatic events in the prison population. First, many inmates report being victims of physical and sexual abuse prior to their incarceration (Briere et al., 2016; Grella

et al., 2013). Second, exposure to extreme forms of violence may co-occur with their offence (Collins and Bailey, 1990; Pollock, 1999). Third, many inmates experience new traumatic events during their confinement, such as solitary confinement (Hagan et al., 2017) and physical and sexual assaults from other inmates or correctional staff (Kubiak, 2004a,2004b; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Neal and Clements, 2010; Sindicich et al., 2014).

Available evidence suggests that the number of event types experienced and probable PTSD tend to follow sex-specific patterns (Komarovskaya et al., 2011; Tolin and Foa, 2006; Tolin and Breslau, 2007). For example, in general population, women tend to show lower rates of exposure to traumatic event types but significantly higher rates

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of PTSD when exposed. In contrast, men experience a greater number of event types, but the risk of developing PTSD is lower (Breslau et al., 2004; Gavranidou and Rosner, 2003; Kessler, 2000). Sex differences are also reported for the type of potentially traumatizing event in incarcerated populations. For example, men are more likely than women to report physical assault, and witnessing someone seriously injured or killed (Gibson et al., 1999a). Utilizing a sample of 581 men inmates from various Ohio prisons, Wooldredge (1998) found that approximately 10% reported being physically assaulted, 20% reported being a victim of theft and, 50% reported being a victim of some type of crime while in prison in the previous six months. A study with women found that they are more likely to report childhood physical abuse, intimate partner abuse, sexual abuse before the age of 13, witnessing family violence, sudden death of a loved one, and sexual assault by a stranger (Huang et al., 2006).

It is noteworthy that certain traumas are reported as being more distressing than others. Individuals who reported sexual and childhood trauma, demonstrated greater difficulty disclosing their trauma than those with other traumatic experiences (Bedard-Gilligan et al., 2012). Trauma researchers have found that after exposure to a traumatic stressor, those who tend to develop PTSD report greater difficulty in disclosing their traumatic event and its details compared to those exposed who did not develop PTSD (Foa and Kozak, 1986; Foa and Cahill, 2001).

In addition to the development of PTSD among this vulnerable population, there is also a high prevalence of other co-occurring psychiatric disorders among men and women inmates. One of the most common mental disorders associated with a history of trauma is major depression. According to the Bureau of Justice, 23.5% of inmates in US prisons reported symptoms of major depression, which contrasts to non-imprisoned population estimates of 6.0–7.9% (James and Glaze, 2006). A study which examined the psychiatric disorders comorbid with PTSD in an inmate sample found that those who had experienced PTSD at some point in their lifetime were more likely to have experienced major depressive disorder, dysthymia and, generalized anxiety disorder than other inmates who had never met criteria for PTSD (Gibson et al., 1999b; Karg et al., 2012). Higher comorbidity rates of mental health disorders and Substance Use Disorders (SUD's) have also been found among inmates. For example, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that 41.7% of inmates have symptoms or mental health disorders that co-occur with a SUD (James and Glaze, 2006). Lynch and colleagues (2014) found that a majority of the women in prison met criteria for co-occurring PTSD and SUD, with a 12-month prevalence of 32%. In the case of men inmates, co-occurring symptoms of PTSD and SUD have been reported (Chilcoat and Breslau, 1998; Kubiak, 2004a, 2004b; McClellan et al., 1997). High rates of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) have also been founded for both sexes (Barkley et al., 2008).

Cultural experiences and beliefs influence the interpretation of and reaction to traumatic stressors, expression of PTSD, symptom severity, coping skills for dealing with symptoms, and likelihood of seeking and completing treatment programs (Jobson and O'Kearney, 2008; Stephens et al., 2010; Trepasso-Grullon, 2012). Additionally, type of trauma exposure affect development of PTSD differently across ethnic groups (Brewin et al., 2000). African American and Hispanic adults are more likely than Caucasian adults to report childhood maltreatment, witnessing domestic violence, and war-related events as traumatic events (Alim et al., 2006; Roberts et al., 2011) after controlling for demographic differences (Alim et al., 2006).

In the United States, the lifetime prevalence of PTSD differs slightly between Latinos (4.4–7.0%), non-Latino Whites (6.5–7.4%), and African Americans (8.6–8.7%) (Alegria et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2011). However, when researchers focused on differences in the risk of developing PTSD, of endorsing more severe PTSD symptoms, or of experiencing more persistent PTSD over time, retrospective and prospective research suggests the risk for PTSD is higher among Latinos

than non-Latinos (Alcántara et al., 2013; Pole et al., 2008).

Studies on the subject of PTSD in adult prison inmates have been performed mainly with Caucasians and African Americans (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Estimates from the Federal Bureau of Prisons (2017) reveal that 33% of US prisoners are Latinos, but little is known about which type of potentially traumatizing events are associated to PTSD in incarcerated Latinos of both sexes (Komarovskaya et al., 2011) and whether it co-occurs with other psychiatric conditions such as ADHD (González et al., 2015; Komarovskaya et al., 2011; Pole et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2011; Ruzich et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). Although community studies reveal that childhood ADHD is more common among men, among persons in correctional facilities the prevalence has been reported higher for women (Edvinsson et al., 2010; Rösler et al., 2009), yet little is known of whether this difference persists when assessing the co-occurrence of ADHD with PTSD in this population.

Understanding the expression of PTSD among Latinos prisoners has significant clinical implications. First, the effect of interventions for PTSD on co-occurring conditions varies according to the type of psychiatric illness (Driessen et al., 2008; Ouimette et al., 1998). Second, such understanding will enhance providers' cultural competence in delivery of treatment interventions aimed at addressing and alleviating PTSD (Pole et al., 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In addition, identifying and understanding of the complexity of this issue will provide much needed relevant data to inform rehabilitation and treatment efforts in the correctional setting.

This study contributes to the research literature by focusing on men and women Latino inmates to inform culturally appropriate care for this population. We examine whether men and women from a representative sample of sentenced individuals confined in the Puerto Rico prison system with probable PTSD as defined by the Davidson Trauma Scale (Davidson et al., 1997), a screener for PTSD, differed significantly by the number of event types experienced, the type of potentially traumatizing event, and in co-occurring psychiatric conditions. We hypothesize that: (1) men prisoners will report greater number of traumatic event types when compared to women; (2) probable PTSD will vary by the type of potentially traumatizing event; (3) probable PTSD will vary by the number of event types experienced; and (4) men and women with probable PTSD will not differ in the prevalence of the following co-occurring conditions: childhood ADHD, major depression and generalized anxiety disorder.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

This study used data from a cross-sectional survey of sentenced inmates in the state prisons of Puerto Rico in 2005–2006 (Albizu-García et al., 2005). A complex probabilistic, multi-stage sample design was used to select a probabilistic sample of 1,331 inmates from 26 penal institutions in PR of which 1179 participated in the study for an 89% response rate. This study was approved by the [removed for blind review].

2.2. Measures

The anonymous survey used two computer assisted interview modalities. The Audio Computer Assisted Self Interview (ACASI) that is self-administered was used for sensitive questions such as illicit drug use and experiences of violence during incarceration to reduce socially desirable responses. The remaining questions were formulated using the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) that involved a face to face interview by an experienced interviewer assisted by the computer. This tool decreases interview and data entry errors. Both questionnaires were programmed using the Questionnaire Development System

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