Prison Can Negatively Affect Health of Family and Friends

The effects of incarceration do not stop at prison walls. A University of Michigan research study has shown that those with a friend or family member in prison will suffer more mental and physical health problems than those who do not know someone in prison.

Daniel J. Kruger, Ph.D., from the University of Michigan School of Public Health, worked with E. Hill De Loney, MA, from the Flint Odyssey, Inc., Health Awareness Center to lead the study. The results were published in the spring issue of Progress in Community Health Partnerships, published by the Johns Hopkins University Press.

More than 1,000 adults in Flint, Mich., were interviewed for the study. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents were white, and 26 percent were African American.

Those who knew someone in prison had 40 percent more days where poor physical health interfered with typical activities, including work. The same group had 54 percent more days where poor mental or emotional health interfered with those activities, the study says.

“Our study demonstrates that incarceration is not only enormously expensive economically, it also has public health costs and these should be taken into consideration,” Kruger says.

Since African American men have higher incarceration rates than white men, researchers wonder how much their work might help explain health disparities between the races. African Americans are more likely to know someone incarcerated, thereby raising the likelihood of the situation affecting their health.

“It’s a double-whammy,” Kruger says.

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