

Psychiatric research done in the correctional facilities

Megan J. Ehret, PharmD, BCPP

Assistant Professor
University of Connecticut

KEYWORDS

correctional facility, psychiatry, research

I am a member of the University of Connecticut Correctional Health Services Research Team. Our team is a partnership between the University of Connecticut Corrections Managed Health Care and the Connecticut Department of Corrections. It is one of the few correctional health care research programs in the nation and includes members from the schools of medicine, nursing, and pharmacy. I have been involved in several different research projects ranging from medication adherence to the development of a collaborative research infrastructure and have used many different resources to create a successful research practice within a correctional facility. I believe conducting research in a correctional facility can be an extremely challenging yet a very rewarding experience. These experiences have taught me many things which could help others consider a correctional environment for their research.

There was a steep learning curve when we started the collaborative effort. I recalled the components of completing an IRB, informed consents, and the usual process of conducting research. A vague recall of my Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training and a prisoner section came to mind. Unlike my previous training, creating and implementing research in a correctional facility was different; there were many additional layers of confidentiality and approvals that were needed. In addition to an approved IRB protocol, an approval from the correctional Research Advisory Committee with a Certificate of Confidentiality (COC) was required. COCs are issued by the NIH to protect identifiable research information from disclosure in any civil, criminal, administrative, legislative, or other proceedings. It allows research objectives to be completed with privacy protection for both the researcher and the participant.

In addition to the normally required paperwork, there were many other concerns that had to be incorporated into a grant and research proposal. For example, in the budget, I had to consider the correctional officers' time to escort study participants to the medical clinic and oversee the research time. I also had to consider whether there would be space in the medical clinic for me to conduct the interviews with the

participants. A contingency plan for a lock-down, which could last several weeks at a particular facility was needed. Finally, analyzing results and completing the study can be challenging as participants may be released prior to study completion or be at court on the day you are scheduled to meet with them.

The reasons inmates choose to participate in the studies are also a concern. Reasons for participating in the studies include having additional time out of their cell or wanting to receive a new treatment intervention. Also, reasons may differ depending on the inmate's sentence, (e.g., someone who is in for life may have very different reasons for participating versus someone who has a short sentence). Compensation that can be provided to the participants in these settings can become difficult to navigate. Unlike community samples where financial compensation can occur, this is not permitted in the correctional environment.

Despite the arduous process, I was fortunate enough to have joined an experienced team, who had navigated the Connecticut correctional system before. Working with this team has enabled me to complete a medication adherence project investigating adherence patterns in female inmates with bipolar disorder. We concluded that although adherence problems were similar to community samples, there may be different reasons for why inmates are nonadherent to their medications. The medication delivery mechanism and the correctional environment may contribute to the decrease in medication adherence. I presented the preliminary results at the 2010 CPNP Annual Meeting, and the final results are currently being submitted for publication. Hopefully our future research will unmask these reasons and allow us to create correction-specific interventions to improve adherence.

If you are interested in our research team or other work we are doing, please visit our [website](#).

How to cite this editor-reviewed article

Ehret MJ. Psychiatric research done in the correctional facilities. *Ment Health Clin* [Internet]. 2012;1(10):249. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.9740/mhc.n102909>