

Race a factor in repeated victimizations of people with mental illness

19 January 2016

African Americans who are mentally ill are at greater risk of being repeatedly victimized than are mentally ill white people, according to criminologists at Georgia State University.

The researchers found the rate of recurring victimization among this population remains stable over time, while it declines during the first year after release from inpatient psychiatric hospitalization for whites.

The study by alumna Christina Policastro and professors Brent Teasdale and Leah Daigle of the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies is the first to analyze revictimization of persons with serious mental illness by race. In the study published recently in the *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, the authors used data from the MacArthur Violence Risk Assessment Study to compare the risk factors of and trajectories for recurring victimization among individuals diagnosed with serious mental illness.

"Earlier studies show that persons with serious mental illness who engage in risky lifestyle behaviors or live in socially disorganized neighborhoods may be especially vulnerable to victimization," said Daigle, an associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. "They are more attractive as targets and have greater exposure to potential offenders."

"We were interested in carrying this research further by showing which behaviors and lifestyles influence victimization over time for persons with mental illness in each racial group, and whether their trajectories differ," said lead author Policastro, who now teaches at the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

Research suggests African Americans with mental disorders encounter a number of social and cultural barriers to seeking help, including limited access to and underuse of [mental health services](#).

"Lower-income urban communities with larger high-need populations, such as homeless and formerly incarcerated individuals, are dependent on publicly funded health care programs for mental health services," said Teasdale, an associate professor. "Yet the availability of these services varies across location, affecting the care options available to many African Americans who suffer from mental illness."

The study suggests these barriers can have dire consequences.

"It is important for [mental health professionals](#) to recognize their clients may vary in their risk of being victimized, as well as experiencing a recurring victimization. This knowledge will help them target and address their clients' key risk factors," Daigle said.

The authors suggest interventions, including improving the accessibility of [mental health services](#) for under-served populations and reducing the social and financial barriers to their use.

"Overcoming these barriers may improve the overall quality of life for African Americans with [mental illness](#) and reduce their vulnerability to being victimized over time," Policastro said.

More information: Christina Policastro et al. The Recurring Victimization of Individuals with Mental Illness: A Comparison of Trajectories for Two Racial Groups, *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1007/s10940-015-9271-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-015-9271-8)

Provided by Georgia State University

APA citation: Race a factor in repeated victimizations of people with mental illness (2016, January 19) retrieved 22 October 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-01-factor-victimizations-people-mental-illness.html>

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