



Seniors in U.S. Prisons Are Experiencing Major Health Issues

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Today, more than 55,000 people over the age of 55 are arrested and detained in the United States every year. Up to two thirds of them experience at least one serious health-related issue during their incarceration, including chronic diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C virus (HCV), chronic pain or serious emotional suffering, according to [a recent report](#) published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society.

For the study, the first of its kind to look into the health burdens of aging prison populations, researchers from the University of California, San Francisco interviewed 125 senior inmates at an urban county jail. Participants ranged in age from 55 to 87 years old and a majority (86 percent) reported incomes far below the federal poverty line.

Sixty-one percent of the respondents said they had two or more chronic conditions, including hepatitis C, HIV, diabetes, heart disease or congestive heart failure. Twenty-eight percent said they experienced severe chronic pain, in many cases without treatment. Almost 50 percent of aging inmates said they experienced “poor” or “fair” health while incarcerated, while 54 percent said they had trouble performing daily activities in jail, such as bathing, eating, using the toilet and walking around.

The state of older inmates’ mental health is similarly dismal. Fifty-six percent of those surveyed showed at least one symptom of psychological distress, 26 percent showed signs of depression and 30 percent showed symptoms of anxiety in their survey responses.

According to researchers, prisoners often experience “accelerated aging” due to the lifelong stresses in their lives—including homelessness and lack of health care—that may be exacerbating these health issues. Study authors are now suggesting that prisons across the country start developing comprehensive programs for assessing, treating and managing geriatric conditions for their aging inmate populations and to develop more rigorous programs to help older adults in jail transition back into the community in a healthy way.