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Mental Health Outcomes Among Incarcerated Individuals Exposed to Suicidal Behavior in Prisons

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Introduction: Exposure to suicidal behaviour is associated with adverse mental health outcomes, including post-traumatic stress symptoms and maladaptive coping strategies (Brough et al., 2022), as well as increased levels of depression and anxiety (Hales et al., 2014). Incarceration itself also significantly increases the likelihood of encountering others' suicidal behaviour. This is particularly important in Lithuanian prisons, where incarcerated individuals reside in community-based facilities. However, there has been limited research focusing on the effects of such exposure on offenders' mental health. Therefore, the present study seeks to examine offenders's mental health following direct exposure to the suicidal behaviour of others in prison settings.

Methods: A non-probability quota sample of 449 adult incarcerated individuals (age 18-82 years, $M=38.62$ $SD=11.13$, 91.1% male), stratified by type of imprisonment and detention, was recruited, representing approximately 10% of the incarcerated population in Lithuania. Participants completed self-report measures assessing exposure to suicidal behaviour and mental health outcomes, including psychological well-being, stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, coping, and suicidality. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare group means, and binary logistic regression analyses were conducted to identify psychological variables differentiating participants exposed versus not exposed to suicidal behaviour.

Results: The main results showed that participants exposed to suicidal behaviour ($n=294$, 65.5%) had significantly poorer psychological well-being and coping, as well as significantly higher levels of stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, and suicidality compared with non-exposed participants (all $p<.05$; Cohen's $d=0.27-0.54$). Higher levels/scores of stress ($OR=3.30$, 95% CI [1.17, 9.33], $p=.02$) and depression ($OR=0.32$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.89], $p=.03$) were associated with increased odds of exposure to suicidal behaviour.

Conclusions: The results of the study indicate that exposure to suicidal behaviour is associated with poorer mental health outcomes among incarcerated individuals. Accordingly, potential improvements to the prison system are suggested to enhance suicide postvention efforts.