

Conference Poster Abstract

Psychotropic medications, weight gain and chronic diseases in a correctional setting: Impact on women's health

Madison L Gates, PhD^{1,3}, Elizabeth Ferguson, MD², Thad Wilkins, MD³, Darra Balance, MLIS¹, and Wonsuk Yoo, PhD^{1,4}

¹Institute of Public & Preventive Health, Augusta University, Augusta, GA; ²Department of Psychiatry and Health Behavior, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta University, Augusta, GA; ³Department of Family Medicine, Medical College of Georgia, Augusta University, Augusta, GA; ⁴Dental College of Georgia, Augusta, GA

Corresponding Author: Madison L Gates • 1120 15th Street, CJ 2300, Augusta, GA 30912 • 706-723-4376 • mgates@augusta.edu

Background: Studies with non-incarcerated populations have found a relationship between psychotropic medications and metabolic side effects, such as weight gain. Few studies have investigated the relationship between psychotropic medications associated with weight gain in prisoners, despite data showing that 73% of female and 55% of male offenders have a mental health problem and 15% have had medications prescribed.

Methods: This longitudinal study investigated the relationship among psychotropic medications and weight gain in prisoners. We hypothesized that women prescribed psychotropic medications gain more weight than men. Data were extracted from Department of Corrections' electronic health records. All prisoners with active records that included weight pre and post initiation of psychotropic medication were included in the study.

Results: Women were prescribed antidepressants in higher proportions compared to men ($\chi^2 = 58.3$, $p < .01$). The differences for antipsychotics were not significant ($\chi^2 = 2.3$, $p = .13$). There were no significant gender differences regarding the percentage of inmates who gained weight. In regard to changes in weight (kg), women on antidepressants gained more weight (mean 6.4 kg) compared to men (mean 2.0 kg), which was significant ($p < .01$). Although women prescribed antipsychotics gained an average of 8.8 kg compared to men prescribed antipsychotics, who gained an average of 1.6 kg, this difference was not significant ($p = .12$). Further, there were no weight gain differences in terms of race or age in contrast to non-incarcerated populations.

Conclusions: The significant weight gain among women prisoners raises important questions about the effects of incarceration on women's health. Despite the significantly greater weight gain among women prisoners, other correlates of weight gain found in non-incarcerated populations are not evident in corrections.

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