

Study Methods



Photo Credit: Ron Levine Prisoners of Age

I recruited a sample of 677 adults aged 50 and older (this is consistent with U.S. corrections that classify the elderly in prison on average as between 50 and 55 years old) who completed anonymous surveys about their backgrounds and past and current experiences of trauma and stress, coping, and health and well-being. Participants' ages ranged from the young old (aged 50-54; 45%), the middle old (Aged 55-64; 44%), and the older old (Aged 65 to 100; 9%). The majority were male compared to female and were from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds. Older adults reported being convicted of violent offenses, sex offenses, drug offenses, or had a history of a delinquent offense or parole violation. One third reported a history of alcohol and substance abuse prior to prison. Three out of four participants reported being a parent and/or grandparent.

One out of two older adults reported being exposed to family violence before the age of 16. The majority (74%) believed someone would get hurt, felt horror at the time (88%) and still felt affected by it in the past year (58%). As for child maltreatment (i.e., emotional, physical, or sexual abuse,) three out of four participants reported still feeling moderately to extremely affected by these earlier traumas.

For more information about the study methods and description of sample and life course cumulative trauma, including in prison, please Tables 1, 2, and 3 in this document or see the following journal articles:

Maschi, T., Viola, D., & Morgen, K. (2013). Trauma and Coping among Older Adults in Prison: Linking Empirical Evidence to Practice. *Gerontologist*. First published online July 19, 2013 doi:10.1093/geront/gnt069.

Maschi, T., Viola, D., Morgen, K., & Koskinen, L. (2013). Trauma, stress, grief, loss, and separation among older adults in prison: the protective role of coping resources on physical and mental wellbeing. *Journal of Crime and Justice*. doi:10.1080/0735648X.2013.808853

For copies of the articles, feel free to email your request to tmaschi@fordham.edu

Table 1. Holistic Profile of a Sample of Older Adults in a Prison (N = 677)					
<i>Characteristics</i>	%	<i>N</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>	%	<i>N</i>
<i>Chronological Age</i>			<i>Family Relations</i>		
Young Old (Aged 50-54)	44.7	288	<i>Marital Status</i>		
Middle Old (Aged 55-64)	44.0	284	Never Married	28.6	182
Oldest Old (Aged 65 to 100)	9.3	60	Married	14.3	91
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>			Partnered-not married	10.8	69
White	35.0	227	Divorced	29.4	187
African American	44.9	291	Separated	7.2	46
Hispanic/Latino	11.0	71	Widowed	7.9	50
Other	9.1	59	Other	1.7	11
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Children and Family</i>		
Male	96.0	626	One or More Children	79.9	504
Female	4.0	26	One or More Children <18	22.7	129
<i>GLBT</i>	2.0	13	One or More Grandchildren	61.3	365
<i>Education</i>			One or More Grandchildren <18	56.4	324
No High School Diploma	10.0	65	Incarcerated Family Member ^c	47.7	306
HS Diploma	74.3	481	<i>Homelessness History</i>		
College degree or above	15.6	101	<i>Income \$20,000 or less</i>	48.8	306
<i>Religion</i>			<i>Benefits History (SSI, MC, MC, Other)</i>	15.8	99
Christian	62.2	335	<i>Occupation</i>		
Islamic/Muslim	13.2	71	Skilled	28.6	191
Atheist/Agnostic	13.2	71	Unskilled	70.0	467
Other	11.5	62	Retired	1.3	9
<i>Military History</i>			<i>Offense History</i>		
			Delinquent Offense	35.3	226
<i>Mental Health/Substance Use</i>			Violent Offense	63.5	413

Mental Health DX	28.2	183	Sex Offense	25.2	163
Alcohol Problem	25.4	165	Drug Offense	45.5	294
Drug Problem	43.5	283	Violation of Probation	44.0	285
Gambling Problem	9.2	60	Parole Violation	41.9	271
Drugs at Time of Offense	42.8	272	<i>Expected Release Date</i>		
Alcohol Time of Offense	33.1	209	0-1 year	21.7	145
Suicide History			2-5 years	36.7	245
Medication History			6-10 years	12.6	84
			11-50 years	12.3	82
<i>Trauma, Grief, Loss History</i>			51 years- Life	4.5	30
Victim of violence < 16	24.4	211	<i>Time Served</i>		
Witness to violence <16	47.7	293	1-5 years	37.5	250
Been in Combat or War	15.2	92	6-19 years	27.7	185
Death of someone close (<i>expected</i>)	69.9	446	20 or more	23.8	159
Financial Stress	53.0	324			
Caregiving Stress (<i>family member</i>)	25.3	159	<i>Solitary Confinement (Days Past Year)</i>		
Abuse/Stress in Prison	52.5	321	1-10	1.7	12
<i>Physical Health (any)</i>	41.0	256	11-150	3.2	22
Eye/vision problem	20.0	132	151-365	3.7	25
Back or neck problem	19.7	130	<i>Number of Incarcerations</i>		
Arthritis/rheumatism	17.0	112	1	32.0	208
Hypertension	15.3	101	2 or more	66.3	442
Walking problem	10.9	72	<i>County of Release</i>		
Fractures, bone/joint injury	10.8	71	Rural	33.0	209
Heart problem	9.9	65	Urban/Suburban	67.0	448
Lung/breathing problem	9.6	63	<i>Services Used (in Prison)</i>		
Diabetes	9.6	63	Prison Religious Participation	71.7	463
HIV/AIDS	4.2	28	Prison MH TX	32.8	212
Hearing Problem	5.0	33			
Cancer	2.4	16			
Stroke	1.5	10			
Other Impairment	8.0	53			
<i>Mental Health (MSD)</i>					
Depression	8.4	56			
Bipolar Disorder	4.5	30			

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	2.7	18		
Schizophrenia/Schizoaffective Disorder	2.2	15		
Other	3.9	26		

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of the Occurrence of Traumatic Experiences, Age of First Occurrence, and Subjective Response at the Time and Now

	Objective Occurrence		Average Age first Occurred		Believe someone could get hurt		Horror felt a time		Moderately to extremely affected past year (Subjective)	
	%	N	M	SD	%	N	%	N	%	N
<i>Direct Exposure (self)</i>										
Had serious accident (self)	52.1	318	26.2	13.4	80.6	250	79.1	246	53.8	171
Been robbed, attacked, mugged	49.6	304	27.5	13.9	79.7	239	81.8	247	48.4	147
Emotional abuse or neglect (self)	36.3	224	13.2	11.5	48.2	106	84.9	186	72.8	163
Been in serious disaster (self)	35.6	216	22.3	15.9	78.9	168	75.7	162	44.4	96
Been in combat or war	15.2	92	19.7	4.6	94.6	87	77.8	70	64.1	59
Kidnapped, hostage, tortured	6.1	37	22.2	12.7	92.1	35	94.4	34	73.0	27
Sexual harassment	12.9	78	18.6	12.4	36.5	27	62.7	47	55.1	43
Physical neglect (self)	18.1	111	12.9	12.7	44.8	47	84.0	89	71.2	79
Physically attacked <age 16	34.4	211	9.2	4.6	62.7	128	88.7	181	58.8	124
Sexual assault <age 16	18.5	117	9.9	3.6	62.1	72	86.7	98	69.0	80
Sexual touch <age 16	21.9	132	10.1	4.4	56.9	74	85.5	106	65.2	86
Physically attacked >age 16	20.6	125	18.7	10.5	68.9	84	84.9	101	66.4	83
Sexual touch >age 16	9.4	57	16.6	9.5	64.9	37	89.1	49	75.4	43
Sexual assault >age 16	9.1	55	19.6	11.1	62.7	32	79.2	42	61.8	34
<i>Indirect Exposure (Witness)</i>										
Seen family violence <age 16	47.7	293	9.3	5.9	74.4	209	88.3	249	58.4	171
Seen serious accident	62.0	392	21.9	12.1	84.6	324	76.2	291	37.5	147
Seen robbery, mugging, attacked	52.2	320	21.2	11.8	76.2	248	69.5	214	27.2	87
Ever lived in violent neighborhood	44.3	270	16.4	12.4	87.7	228	71.2	185	56.0	151

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of the Occurrence of Stressful Life Experiences, Age of First Occurrence, and Subjective Response at the Time and Now

	Objective Occurrence		Average Age First Occurred		Believe someone could get hurt		Horror felt a time		Moderately to Extremely affected past year	
	%	N	M	SD	%	N	%	N	%	N
Stressful Life Experiences										
<i>Death, Separation, Loss</i>										
Someone close died (<i>not unexpectedly</i>)	69.9	446	38.1	15.5	19.5	78	67.3	264	62.1	277
Unexpected death-someone close	60.2	372	36.5	15.6	29.3	103	79.9	291	69.6	259
Forced separation from child (self)	27.5	167	34.9	13.1	24.2	38	84.1	132	77.8	130
Separation or divorce (self)	52.7	323	34.0	10.6	12.0	38	48.9	153	48.6	157
Parents separated or divorced	42.1	256	9.2	6.8	16.3	39	55.6	135	47.3	121
<i>Physical and Mental Health</i>										
Serious physical illness (self)	41.0	256	37.7	16.4	58.4	142	81.6	199	68.0	174
Serious mental illness (self)	26.8	162	34.4	14.9	62.4	93	85.5	130	70.4	114
Caregiver of person serious illness	24.5	148	37.2	13.5	30.6	44	59.4	85	61.5	91
Had child with handicap	5.4	32	30.0	14.1	33.3	11	72.7	24	71.9	23
<i>Financial Strain</i>										
Serious money problems (self)	51.9	319	32.0	14.0	24.6	75	74.4	229	61.1	195
<i>Prison & Institutional Care</i>										
In foster care or adoption (self)	9.8	60	8.4	8.3	25.0	12	60.0	33	51.7	31
Prior jail term (self)	68.0	422	23.7	10.7	35.4	148	63.9	267	59.5	251
Close family member in jail/prison	44.7	276	22.2	14.4	27.3	73	45.3	121	45.0	124
Experienced abuse/stress in prison	52.5	321	46.5	13.3	73.7	227	94.2	292	85.7	275