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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT STUDY FINDS ONE IN FOUR WOMEN IN JAILS HAVE SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS, WITH CO-OCCURRING POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Office of Justice Programs’ (OJP) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) today announced the findings of a recent study which found that a national sample of women in jails showed high rates of mental health problems, with a majority of the participants meeting diagnostic criteria for serious mental illness (SMI), lifetime post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and/or substance use disorder (SUD).

Titled *Women’s Pathways to Jail: The Roles and Intersections of Serious Mental Illness and Trauma*, the study found that one in four women in jail met the criteria for SMI, PTSD and SUD. The study also found that:

- Trauma and mental illness were associated with onset of crime.
- Many women in jail met the criteria for SMI, PTSD and/or SUD in the past 12 months and 25 percent reported severe functional impairment in the past year.
- Half of the women received substance use disorder treatment or mental health treatment prior to incarceration.
- Most of the women in jail experienced multiple types of adversity and interpersonal violence in their lives.
- Women with SMI were more likely to have experienced trauma, to be repeat offenders, and to have earlier onset of substance use disorder and running away.

“The overrepresentation of women with mental illness in jails has tragic consequences for children and families. It is important that the field of criminal justice understands how mental illness, trauma, and other disorders are related to women becoming involved in the criminal justice system,” said BJA Director Denise E. O’Donnell. “The information from this study can help us develop strategies to address and respond to these issues.”

Funded by BJA, the study included 491 women and both urban and rural jails from four geographically distinct regions of the United States – the Southwest, the Mid-Atlantic, the Northwest, and the Deep South. The study was conducted by Drs. Shannon Lynch (Idaho State University), Dana DeHart (University of South Carolina), Joanne Belknap (University of Colorado), and Bonnie Green (Georgetown University). A copy of the report is available at www.bja.gov/Publications/Women_Pathways_to_Jail.pdf.

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Acting Assistant Attorney General Mary Lou Leary, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at <http://www.ojp.gov>.

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