



Racial Disparities in Individuals With Co-occurring Serious Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders

One in four people with serious mental illness also struggle with a substance use disorder.¹ Millions more struggle with misuse of one or more substances without meeting the high criteria for a substance use disorder.² Marginalized populations, such as racial and ethnic minorities, are disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of co-occurring disorders. These same populations tend to have the least access to care.

For different racial and ethnic groups, several factors greatly influence the likelihood of a diagnosis of a co-occurring disorder, whether an individual will seek treatment and an individual's access to treatment. These factors include cultural differences; associated stigma of these illnesses within communities; racial bias in health care; and systemic racial disparities, including neighborhood segregation and poverty.

Mental health treatment for people with serious mental illness and substance use disorders

People with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance use disorders who are members of racial and ethnic minority populations receive less treatment compared to white Americans.

Mental health treatment prevalence for people with serious mental illness and substance use disorders, by racial/ethnic group, 2019³

	Percent who received any mental health treatment in past year
White non-Hispanic (NH)	69%
Black/African American NH	52%
Hispanic	51%
Asian NH	48%
Native American/Alaskan Native NH	63%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander NH	70%
More than one race	66%

Race, mental illness and the criminal justice system

Individuals with co-occurring substance use disorder and serious mental illness are overrepresented in every part of the criminal justice system. Race is a compounding factor that puts this already vulnerable population at a higher risk for a variety of negative outcomes.

1.3x 

Black Americans with serious mental illness are 1.3 times more likely to die in a law enforcement encounter compared to white Americans with serious mental illness.⁴

1.5x 

Black Americans with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance use disorders are 1.5 times more likely to be arrested and booked for a crime compared to white Americans with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance use disorders.⁵

2.5x 

Black and Hispanic Americans with mental illness are 2.5 times more likely to be subject to solitary confinement when incarcerated compared to white Americans with mental illness.⁶

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References

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- 5 Prince, J. S., & Wald, C. (2018). Risk of criminal justice system involvement among people with co-occurring severe mental illness and substance use disorder. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, *58*, 1–8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0160252717302303?via%3Dihub>
- 6 Kaba, F., Solimo, A., Graves, J., Glowa-Kollisch, S., Vise, A., MacDonald, R., Waters, A., Rosner, Z., Dickey, N., Angell, S., & Venters H. (2015). Disparities in mental health referral and diagnosis in the New York City Jail Mental Health Service. *American Journal of Public Health*, *105*, 1911–1916. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302699>