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Linkages Between Neighborhood Qualities and Behavioral Health for Individuals on Probation and Parole

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BACKGROUND: Individuals in the criminal justice system have high rates of mental health and substance use concerns (Robertson et al., 2020). Furthermore, these justice-involved individuals also face many challenges in their social environments (e.g., neighborhoods). In fact, rates of neighborhood violence and instability are high for justice-involved individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods (Leverentz, 2011). Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that these neighborhood qualities might have an adverse impact on mental health and substance use for individuals in the criminal justice system. To that end, we examined the relation of neighborhood qualities (i.e., safety, cohesion, violence, and shared activities) to mental health, alcohol use, and substance use among individuals on probation and parole.

METHOD: Individuals ($N = 101$) on probation and parole in four states (two Midwestern, one Eastern, one Southern) completed measures that assessed mental health problems (*Brief Symptom Inventory*; Derogatis, 1993), substance use (*Drug Use Frequency Questionnaire*; O'Farrell et al., 2003), alcohol use (*Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test*; Babor et al., 1992), and various qualities of their neighborhoods (i.e., safety, cohesion, violence, activities; *Neighborhood Qualities Measure*; Mujahid et al., 2007).

RESULTS: Backward stepwise regressions examined the effects of neighborhood qualities on mental health, alcohol use, and substance use in individuals on probation and parole. In the final models, neighborhood violence was retained as the sole predictor of both mental health and substance use. No significant predictors emerged for alcohol use.

IMPLICATIONS: The results demonstrate that neighborhood violence is linked with mental health problems and substance use in individuals on probation and parole. These findings highlight the importance of neighborhood contexts for justice-involved individuals' psychological and behavioral well-being. Our results have implications for policymakers regarding the allotment of resources to neighborhoods in which individuals on probation and parole reside.