

## THE STATE OF PLAY

Each month, we examine how the mental health conversation is evolving, with a focus on youth, women, and the justice system. Last month, we highlighted four communities that have amplified critical mental health conversations over the past year. This month, we analyze the intersection of mental health and the justice system.

The diagram below illustrates the conversation around mental health and the justice system. It assesses 451 news articles from January to March 2021. Takeaways include:

### Police reform starts with mental health response.

Calls for police reform in the U.S. have hit a new pitch from activists, **district attorneys** and **police officers** themselves. While “defunding the police” remains a rallying cry for some, a far more popular idea – endorsed even by **Attorney General Merrick Garland** – is to transform how law enforcement responds to **mental health crises**.

### The connections between racial bias, mental illness and incarceration.

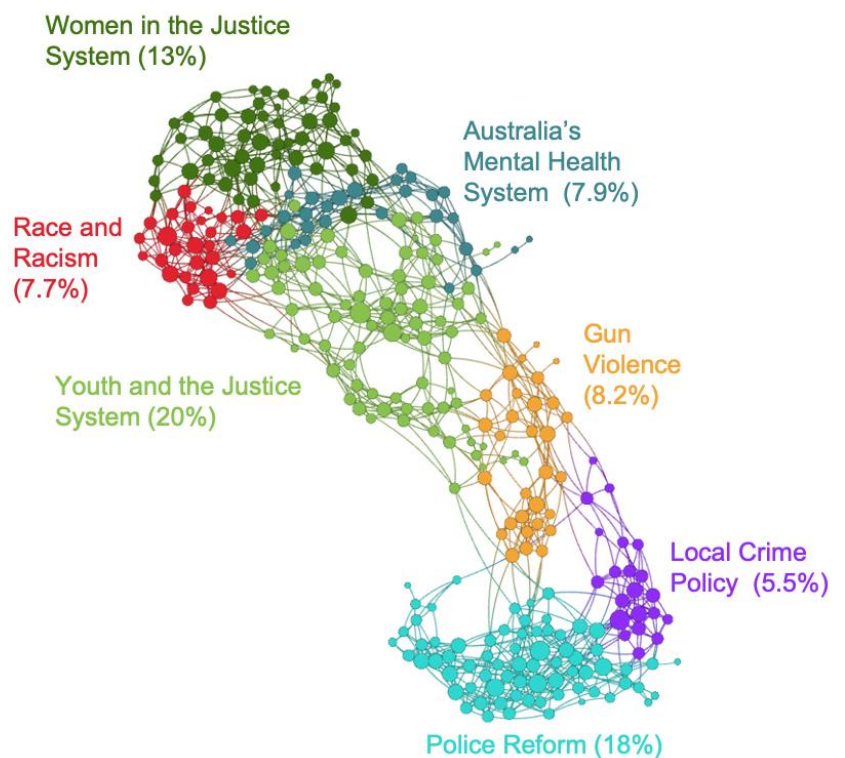
The surge in hate crimes against **Asian-Americans** illustrates this interconnectedness, as many people who have been arrested for assaults against Asian Americans – in **New York** especially – have histories of mental illness.

### Youth need systems that work for them.

State policymakers in **Utah** and **Colorado** are focused on shutting down the “school-to-prison pipeline.” The solutions they are pushing forward include increased funding for youth programs, trauma-informed care, racial equity and age-appropriate discipline. In Canada, the **Ontario government** is building a new model to help youth transition out of the foster care system. The **U.S. government** might consider taking notes, as the private foster care system is under scrutiny for being rife with trauma and abuse.

## Mental Health and the Justice System

January – March 2021



### Women and minority groups face unique problems – and not just in the U.S.

A debate is raging in the U.K. about the government’s controversial decision to **expand prison capacity** for women, while Australians face dire lack of access to mental healthcare within the country’s **failing system** – leading an alarmingly high number of **indigenous people** to die in prison.

## THOUGHT STARTERS

A roundup of thought-provoking pieces on mental health for youth, women, and the justice system.



### Youth Mental Health: Mobile Response – A Healing Investment

In many states across the U.S., “mobile response” is emerging as a first-responder solution and alternative to law enforcement. If implemented properly, mobile response can change the lives of youth experiencing mental health challenges – especially Black youth who carry with them generations of trauma and mistrust of government institutions. In a **recent report**, the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) makes a strong case for police-free mobile response for communities of color:

*“Mobile response allows providers and clinicians to meet people where they are, physically and emotionally. It provides youth and young adults with the services they may not usually have access to in their schools or communities...[and] represents a healing investment that has positive outcomes for mental health and community safety.”*



### Women’s Mental Health: There’s Nothing “Silly” About Care Work

The Biden Administration’s “American Jobs Plan” could inject \$2 trillion into the economy – including, potentially, \$400 billion in home care services and additional support for care workers. In early April, a **Politico** article claimed it “silly” to call care work infrastructure. Promptly, caregivers and women’s rights advocates responded with **fervor** in support of the notion that care work is a critical backbone of the U.S. economy:

*“It’s no secret that care workers – who are disproportionately women of color and low-income women – have been hit extremely hard by the pandemic. In childcare alone, 56 percent of childcare programs are losing money every day, and 350,000 childcare workers lost their jobs in a single month at the beginning of the pandemic...devaluing care work reveals the many gendered, racialized and ableist assumptions baked into the U.S. economic system.”*

And that’s in addition to the mental health crisis that is putting working mothers on the **brink of breakdown**.



### The Justice System: The Link Between TBI and Incarceration

Between 50 to 80 percent of prisoners and individuals on parole in the U.S. have brain injuries – compared to only 8.5 percent of the general population, according to University of Denver neuropsychologist Kim Gorgens. **The Economist** discusses the linkage between preventing traumatic brain injuries and reducing crime:

*“For many the damage is done early. Brain injuries are particularly common among boys and young men, whose brains are still maturing. Those from poor backgrounds who live in cities are especially at risk. A curious child who is rarely supervised is more likely to fall and seriously hurt himself...they are then far more likely to drop out of school and end up in prison.”*

## THE PUNCHLIST



### 3 ways to take action on this month.

#### 1 Join

Throughout 2020, NAMI's **"You Are Not Alone"** campaign brought the mental health community together to spread hope to those experiencing mental health challenges during the pandemic. Starting in May, NAMI is amplifying this message and has published a **2021 Awareness Event Guide** to help everyone join the movement.

#### 2 Discuss:

On June 4<sup>th</sup> from 11:30am-1:00pm EDT, the Sozosei Foundation is hosting a virtual book club featuring authors and renowned psychiatrist Dr. James Knoll and renowned psychologist Dr. Joel Dvoskin in conversation with Sozosei Board Member Mary Chi Michael. Join for a discussion and lively Q&A about their chapter on the history of criminalization of mental illness from the recently released book ***Decriminalizing Mental Illness***. To learn more about the Sozosei Foundation, click [here](#).

#### 3 Listen:

If you or someone you know is struggling to connect with a teen dealing with mental health struggles, this **20-minute podcast** from NPR's "Life Kit" might help. Experts explain the new family ecosystem that has emerged during the pandemic and the importance of modeling physical and mental wellbeing.

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