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Serious Mental Illness and Chronic Criminal Justice Involvement: Findings from The Massachusetts Mental Healthy / Criminal Justice Cohort Study

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Serious Mental Illness and Chronic Criminal Justice Involvement: Findings from The Massachusetts Mental Healthy / Criminal Justice Cohort Study

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Comments
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Why is this Issue Important?
- Abuse of jails as mental hospitals
- Persons with severe mental illness 1.5 times as likely to experience incarceration as to be hospitalized for treatment
- State mental health agencies involved in services for diversion and also supporting reentry of their clients

The Massachusetts Mental Health / Criminal Justice Cohort (N = 13,816)
A statewide sample of public mental health service recipients

Inclusion Criteria:
- Receiving case management, inpatient treatment or residential services from Massachusetts Department of Mental Health between 7/1/91 and 6/30/92

Tracking Arrest:
- Arrest data were obtained from the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board’s “Criminal Offender Record Information” (CORI System)
- Cohort followed through December 2000 (i.e., just under 10 years)

What Sort of Things Are They Arrested For?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Cohort</th>
<th>% of Arrests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felony Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misdemeanor Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>5096</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felony Property Offenses</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misdemeanor Property Offenses</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-Related Offenses</td>
<td>1201</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms Violations</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications
- Data challenge the notion that the vast majority of arrestees are “nuisance offenders” who can readily be diverted
- There is considerable variation in offense types and intensity of involvement
- Demographic risk factors are similar to what we see in the general offending population:
  - Male + Female (although less so)
  - Younger individuals at much higher risk
  - Males > Females (although less so)

Characterizing Trajectory-Based Groups

Trajectory Group I (29.6%)
- One charge early, drops off to average near 0

Trajectory Group II (19.9%)
- Stable across the time period; average one arrest very 2 years

Trajectory Group III (15.1%)
- Average one arrest per year through period

Trajectory Group IV (11.9%)
- Begins period averaging 2 per year; drops steadily over the period

Trajectory Group V (4.5%)
- Starts high (average of 5 in first year) but descends; ends period with average of 1

Trajectory Analysis Finding:
Identifying a Small But Troubling Group
A small number of cohort members (“Group V”, 92 people, 4.5% of arrestees) displayed a problematic persistent arrest pattern

- Begin observation period averaging five arrests per year; and with an average of one – two
- Principal charges – drugs, “sex for hire”
- A group with serious addiction problems
- Not clustered in any demographic group (i.e., gender, age, race / ethnicity)

Trajectory Analysis Conclusion
This is a group that is small but makes significant demands on the criminal justice system.
Their propensity for drug use and sex crimes taxes public health and safety issues likely frustrates the mental health system.