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

William H. Fisher  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Steven M. Banks  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

Kristen M. Roy-Bujnowski  
*University of Massachusetts Medical School*

*See next page for additional authors*

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

Authors
William H. Fisher, Steven M. Banks, Kristen M. Roy-Bujnowski, Albert J. Grudzinskas Jr., Jonathan C. Clayfield, and Nancy Wolff

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
- Stale 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
Focused: Arrests, Charges, Temporal patterns
Inclusion Criteria: Recurring case management, inpatient treatment or residential services from Massachusetts Department of Mental Health between 7/1/91 and 6/30/92
18 years of age or older

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)

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William H Fisher, Ph.D. 1,2; Steven M. Banks, Ph.D. 1; Kristen Roy-Bujnowski, M.A. 3; Albert J Grudzinskas, Jr., J.D. 3; Jonathan C Clayfield, M.A. 1; Nancy Wolff, Ph.D. 1
1 Center for Mental Health Services Research, University of Massachusetts Medical School
2 Center for Behavioral Health Services and Criminal Justice Research, Rutgers University

What is the Extent of Criminal Justice Involvement Among a SMHAs’s Clientele?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>% of Cohort</th>
<th>% of Arrested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age (1991)
- 18-24    18.3  50.7
- 25-29    15.8  43.8
- 30-39    22.5  34.0
- 40-49    26.4  26.4
- 50-54    14.3  18.0
- 55+      18.8  6.7

Race
- "White"  32.2  26.5
- "Non-White" 17.8  33.3

Overall Cohort Offending Patterns
- 3,856 individuals were arrested at least once
- Overall 10 year prevalence of arrest for the cohort = 27.9%
- Range = 1-71
- 75% had 6 or fewer
- 17,373 total arrests (identified with CORI data)
- Many arrests involve multiple charges or "counts"
- 27,004 felony charges (serious crimes against persons and property, drug charges)
- 14,850 misdemeanor charges (e.g., citation offenses, low level drug possession charges, prostitution, etc.)
- 666 persons (4.8% of cohort, 17.2% of arrestees) were sentenced to prison or jail at least once during the observation period

What Sort of Things Are They Arrested For?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Cohort</th>
<th>% of Arrested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felony Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misdemeanor Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>1096</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felony Property Offenses</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes Against Public Order</td>
<td>1744</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-Related Offenses</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>5.2%</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 + Felonious (although less so)
- Younger individuals at much higher risk
- "Non-white" > "White"

Are Arrests Unique Events or Part of a Pattern of Criminal Justice Involvement?

Characterizing Trajectory-Based Groups
Trajectory Group I (1096): One charge early, drops off to average near 0
Trajectory Group II (39.9%): 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 (12%): 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
- Begins observation period averaging 5 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 enormous demands on the criminal justice system. Their propensity for drug use and sex crimes raise public health and safety issues likely frustrate the mental health system.