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

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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
- 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)

What is the Extent of Criminal Justice Involvement Among a SMHA's Clients? (N = 13,816)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Type</th>
<th>% of Cohort</th>
<th>% of Arrested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felony Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misdemeanor Crimes Against Persons</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felony Property Offenses</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misdemeanor Property Offenses</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimes Against Public Order</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug-Related Offenses</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firearms Violations</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications
- Data challenges the notion that the vast majority of arrestees are "nuisance offenders" who can merely be diverted.
- Cross-sectional comparisons are similar to what we see in the general offending population:
  - "White" - 19.0%
  - "Non-White" - 17.8%
  - Males > Females (although less so)
  - Younger individuals at much higher risk
  - 666 persons (4.8% of cohort, 17.2% of arrestees) were sentenced to prison or jail
  - Many arrests involve multiple charges or "counts"
  - A small number of cohort members ("Group V": 92 people, 4.5% of arrestees) displayed a problematic persistent arrest pattern
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Characterizing Trajectory-Based Groups

Trajectory Group I (29.6%)
- 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 (12.4%)
- Begins period averaging 2 per year; drops steadily over the period

Trajectory Group V (4.3%)
- 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 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 interrelated demands on the criminal justice system. Their propensity for drug use and sex crimes (and public health and safety issues) likely frustrate the mental health system.