



Research at a glance

Federally Sentenced Offenders with Mental Disorders: Correctional Outcomes and Correctional Response

KEY WORDS: *offenders with mental disorders, offender mental health, outcomes for offenders with mental disorders, mental disorders*

Why we did this study

Offenders with mental disorders (OMD) constitute a growing percentage of the offender population, representing a group that poses a challenge to those mandated to provide the specialized services many require. An earlier CSC study had found that the OMD group actually had better correctional outcomes than the group without mental disorders. Updated research is required to assess the impact mental health diagnoses have on institutional and community outcomes and to provide an examination of the correctional supervision of these offenders.

What we did

Coding of OMS files resulted in the identification of 202 offenders (17 women) with a mental disorder. Profiles and outcomes of these offenders were compared with 594 offenders without a disorder who were under custody at the same time. Correctional response was assessed by comparing the groups' initial custody placement, their rates of discretionary release and the rates of revocation for technical violations.

What we found

Offenders with mental disorders had higher overall risk and need ratings and higher rates of substance abuse, but lower needs in the domains of criminal associates and antisocial attitudes. They were more likely to be serving a current sentence for violence and less likely to be married or living common-law. In spite of their mental health problems, 61% had completed a correctional program, a rate only slightly lower than for offenders without mental disorders.

The correctional response to offenders with mental disorders indicated that they were more likely to be initially placed in maximum security and less likely to be placed in a minimum security institution despite having Custody Rating Scale results that did not differ from the comparison group. They were less likely to be granted a discretionary release in the form of a

day parole and more likely to be released on their statutory release dates. They were more likely to be revoked for technical violations. Given the high risk and need rating for these offenders, however, this cannot be attributed to their mental diagnosis alone.

Offenders with a mental disorder had significantly more minor and major institutional charges and more transfers to involuntary and voluntary segregation. On release, they were more likely to be reconvicted even when risk and need rating, age and substance abuse were controlled, although this pattern did not hold for Aboriginal offenders. The factors that best explained outcome for this sample were mental disorder, drug abuse, and criminal attitudes. The small number of women in the sample did not allow for a separate analysis by gender.

What it means

A diagnosis of a mental disorder contributes to poorer correctional outcomes even when risk, age and substance abuse are controlled. A supervision strategy that directly addresses the mental disorder as well as their criminogenic needs is recommended to reduce reoffending for this group.

For more information

Stewart, L., Wilton, G., & Cousineau, C. (2012) *Federally Sentenced Offenders with Mental Disorders: Correctional Outcomes and Correctional Response*. Research Report R-268. Ottawa, ON: Correctional Service of Canada.

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