



Research Snippet

Substance Abuse Among Male Offenders

KEY WORDS *substance abuse, criminal risk, severity, treatment*

Impetus

Substance abuse problems are prevalent among individuals involved in the correctional system. Understanding substance use profiles of offenders and substance-crime links provides clear direction regarding the development and provision of effective intervention programming and case supervision and management.

What we did

Participants were 3350 male offenders who completed the Computerized Assessment of Substance Abuse (CASA) at intake to federal custody between 2002 and 2007. We examined a range of variables related to substance abuse problems and offending.

What we found – Offenders in custody

- Almost 80% of offenders in federal custody have a substance abuse problem requiring an intervention response.
- 34% were assessed as needing high intensity substance abuse programming, 18% needed moderate intensity, and 26% needed low intensity intervention.
- Of offenders with substance abuse problems, approximately 66% were under the influence at the time of their current offence, and 41% claimed to be under the influence during the commission of most or all of their past crimes. When considering just those offenders with severe substance abuse problems, these numbers rose to 94% and 75%, respectively.
- Of the offenders who admitted to being under the influence at the time of their current offence, 88% claimed that substance use made them more likely to commit the offence, 89% claimed that they would not have committed the offence if they had not been using, and 66% felt that substance use made them more physically aggressive or violent.
- Approximately 38% of offenders with substance abuse problems claimed to have committed their current offence to support their substance use behaviour. The likelihood of committing an offence to support substance use increased substantially with substance abuse problem severity – 78% of offenders with a severe substance abuse problem admitted committing their current offence to support substance use.
- Offenders with the most serious substance abuse problems are twice as likely to re-offend (38% high risk to re-offend versus 19% of offenders with lower severity problems).

- These offenders face multiple serious challenges that can contribute to their risk for future criminal activity and involvement, such as criminal associates, family and marital problems, and anticipated community adjustment problems.

What we found – Offenders in the community

- In the community, 70% of offenders were identified as having a substance abuse problem.
- 54% of offenders on release participated in one or more substance abuse programs while incarcerated.
- In terms of required treatment for substance abuse, 26% of offenders required high intensity programming, 18% required moderate intensity, and 30% needed low intensity intervention services in the community.
- Offenders in the community with the most serious substance abuse problems are more than twice as likely to re-offend (33% are high risk to re-offend versus 13% of offenders with lower severity problems).
- In the community, these offenders face multiple serious challenges that can contribute to their risk for future criminal activity and involvement, such as criminal associates, employment problems, family and marital problems, and community adjustment problems.

What it means

A large majority of offenders, incarcerated and in the community, experience problems with substance abuse. Substance abuse is linked to criminal risk; the linkage is strongest for those offenders with the most serious problems. Not all offenders have the same severity of problems, signaling the need for a range of treatment options to fully meet their needs. Intervention and case supervision need to address the range of factors that put offenders at risk in order to maximize their chances for successful reintegration into the community.

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