

Effects of serious mental illness and substance abuse on criminal offenses



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Summary of the of the of the The study d, ' Effects of Serious Mental Illness and Substance Abuse on Criminal Offences was conducted by John Junginger, Keith Claypoole, Ranilo Laygo and Annette Crisanti, and its primary aim was to " decipher the effects of serious mental illness and substance abuse on the criminal offences of a group of community residents with serious mental illness and substance abuse disorders".(Junginger et al.) These community residents were members of the Hawaii Jail Diversion Project, which had been conceptualized to relate the functional outcomes of persons moved out of jail into mental health and substance abuse services with that of a bunch of criminals arrested and jailed. Institutional review board (IRB) approval was taken from the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and from the Hawaii Department of Health. Participants were also required to sign an IRB-approved consent form before being part of the study. The 113 community residents who partook in this study were serial recruits of the Hawaii Jail Diversion Project between May 1998 and August 2001. All these individuals were suffering from serious mental illness and simultaneously occurring substance use disorder. Their average age was 37. 6+-8. 8 yrs and seventy two percent of them were male. Also, forty one percent were white, twenty nine percent were Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, eight percent were multiracial and seven percent were Asian. On the whole, the individuals had 12. 1+-2. 2 yrs of education. Forty percent had been diagnosed with major depressive disorder, thirty four percent with schizophrenia spectrum disorders and twenty six percent with bipolar disorder. Note that all the participants had been indicted for criminal offences. They were asked a few probe questions to determine the reason why they committed crimes, and they were as follows: Why did u commit the crime? Is there anything u would want to tell

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me about the crime? Have u told me everything I need to know in order to understand why u committed the crime? If your answer is no, then tell me what else I would be required to know? The participants' answers were noted down as and when they spoke. 5-point scales were used to independently determine whether serious mental illness or substance abuse had a bearing on the crime committed. The results showed that substance abuse had comparatively greater influence than psychiatric symptoms on criminal offences. The findings from this study indicated that the criminalization hypothesis should give way to other factors that tend to have more influence on the commitment of crime like unemployment, poverty, etc. Research seems to indicate that a good proportion of those in jails have severe mental illness though it is not necessary that people in jails ought to have mental health issues. (Lamb et al.) Drug users do suffer from mental health problems to some extent, which in turn can lead them to criminal behaviour. Also, it has been observed that most substance abusers and criminals tend to come from educationally and financially deprived backgrounds.

References Lamb Richard M. D. and Weinberger Linda, Ph. D. Persons With Severe Mental Illness in Jails and Prisons: A Review *Psychiatric Services* 49: 483-492, April 1998 [http://www. ps. psychiatryonline.](http://www.ps.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/abstract/49/4/483)

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