

Essay on mental illness and criminal justice

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Mental illness is characterized by the inability to reason logically, establish control of emotions and relate with other people. These aspects increase the chances of committing illegal acts or putting the live of oneself or other people in danger by the affected individual. Owing to this factor, the population of mentally ill inmates in U. S jails is on the increase with a high percentage for serious cases; most of which are related to alcoholism and drug use disorders (Arons, 2000). By mid-2005, more than half of prison and jail inmates experienced mental health related problems (James & Glaze, 2006). The estimate for state, federal and jail inmates were at 56%, 45% and 64% respectively.

Research shows that the number of mentally ill persons on probation and parole is quite high; four to five times that of normal persons. This evident increase in such offenders is mounting pressure on the government and correctional systems to improve on their provision of medical care for the individuals (Urban Institute, 2013).

According to James and Glaze (2006), a survey in 2004 shed light on the symptoms of depression, mania and psychotic disorders displayed by mentally ill inmates. Depression and mania are characterized by; constant sadness, lack of interest in normal activities, lack of sleep, anger issues and irritability. Psychotic disorders on the other hand are evident through dilusion and hallucination episodes.

Urban Institute (2013) states that prisoners with mental problems have difficulty in fitting back into the society once they are released. Some of these difficulties include; unemployment and lack of health insurance to cater for vital medications which result in high chances of re-committing

criminal offenses and ending up in incarceration again. In order to deal with these problems and facilitate a reduction in the number of mentally ill inmates in correctional facilities, certain actions must be taken. While incarcerated, there is a need to provide the inmates with constant and quality medication to enable him/her deal with the above mentioned symptoms. This should be continued even after their release (Arons, 2000). The provision of insurance coverage helps them acquire treatment at lower expenses and become healthy enough to maintain a job for financial income.

Subsequently, the inmates should be involved in community-based services in order to break the chain of offenses, medical cases and drug abuse that prevents them from progressing. This is an idea supported by both the criminal justice system and mental health professionals.

In dealing with mental illness in the criminal justice system, a set of programs has been set to carry out a screening process of individuals to determine whether they are ill or not (Arons, 2000). This is carried out by professionals then a negotiation is done between the prosecutors, defendant attorney and health providers to come up with an alternative to prosecution. This alternative is a mental health diversion characterized by a reduction in charges and provision of treatment.

Diversion programs can be executed by the police, pre-trial service agencies and the courts. They can be done before or after formal charges have been brought against the individual in question; pre-booking and post-booking diversions respectively. The effectiveness of these programs relies on the contributions of the parties involved. The police have a role of ensuring the

provision of security, transport, law enforcement resources and the ability to handle violence exhibited by the individual. Mental health specialists on the other hand should present sufficient knowledge and experience in dealing with mental health; diagnosis, crisis evaluation and interaction with the patient.

For the dangerous cases, individuals engaged in serious crimes ought to be incarcerated. This is the only way to ensure public safety is maintained and the individual is provided with medical care. There are strategies that can be adopted to make these programs effective. First and foremost, the process of identifying whether a person is dangerous or not should be based on criteria set by both the health professionals and criminal justice system.

Individuals accused of crimes must undergo screening to determine their sanity (Arons, 2000). These diversion mechanisms should also be effective enough to facilitate change in individuals through medication, community service and rehabilitation.

In conclusion, the number of mental illness related incarcerations are likely to increase over the next years unless measures are put in place to curb the increase. Aspects such as alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment and lack of medical provisions are some of the major catalysts that have to be dealt with to facilitate a reduction in this number in local, state and federal correction institutions.

Reference

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