

## Compelling Data about People with Mental Illnesses in the Criminal Justice System

*Criminal justice professionals who work in law enforcement, court, and corrections settings routinely encounter individuals with mental illnesses, and must often make difficult decisions about how to respond to this population. These decisions have a significant impact on the numbers of people with mental illnesses that cycle through our prisons and jails. The statistics listed below help illustrate the nature and scope of the problem.*

- During the year 2000, law enforcement officers in Florida transported more than 40,000 people with mental illnesses for involuntary 72-hour psychiatric examinations under the Baker Act. This exceeded the number of arrests in the state during 2000 for either aggravated assault (39,120) or burglary (26,087).<sup>1</sup>
- The Albuquerque (NM) Police Department's crisis intervention team (CIT) reported that in 1999, 15 percent of calls involved individuals attempting suicide, and 30 percent threatening suicide. In 14 percent of calls the suspect possessed a weapon.<sup>2</sup>
- The rate of injuries to officers responding to "mental disturbance" calls in Memphis (TN) decreased from one in every 28,571 events to one in every 142,857 events between the three-year period prior to implementing a CIT and the three-year period that followed the tenth anniversary of its implementation. Disturbance calls, including domestic violence calls, did not show a similar trend during this period.<sup>3</sup>
- Approximately 5 percent of the U.S. population has a serious mental illness,<sup>4</sup> compared with approximately 16 percent of the prison or jail population,<sup>5</sup> according to U.S. Department of Justice reports.
- In 1999, the Los Angeles County Jail and New York's Rikers Island jail held more people with mental illnesses than the largest psychiatric inpatient facilities in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute . (2001). *The Florida Mental Health Act (The Baker Act) 2000 Annual Report*. Florida: ,McGaha, A. C. & Stiles, P. G.

<sup>2</sup> Bower, D. & Petit, W. G. (2001). The Albuquerque Police Department's Crisis Intervention Team: A Report Card. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 70(2).

<sup>3</sup> Dupont, R. & Cochran, S. (2000). Police Response to Mental Health Emergencies—Barriers to Change. *Journal of American Academy of Psychiatry and Law*, 28, 338-44

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2000). *Prison and Jail Inmates at Midyear 2000*. Washington, DC: Beck, A. J. & Karberg, J. C.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs Bureau of Justice Statistics. (1997). *Correctional Populations in the United States 1997*. Washington, DC. These numbers will be updated based on the upcoming BJS report on people with mental illnesses in prisons and jails.

<sup>6</sup> Torrey, E. F. (1999). Reinventing Mental Health Care. *City Journal* 9(4).

- As of December 2003, 7,500 inmates (11 percent of the total prison population) were on the mental health caseloads inside New York's 70 state prisons. This figure represents a 71 percent increase in this population since 1991 and is three times the rate of increase of the general prison population during the same period. The increase may be due, in part, to increased awareness of the issue: mental health screenings, assessments, and services have become more commonplace and effective.<sup>7</sup>
- During fiscal year 2003, within six months of their release, 67 percent of the offenders with mental illnesses in Kansas who were under community supervision were returned to prison for a condition violation (compared with about 40 percent of the total population released to supervision).<sup>8</sup>
- According to a 2004 report, Miami-Dade County taxpayers spend \$18 per day to house inmates from the general population in jail. Taxpayers spend \$125 per day to house inmates with mental illnesses in jail.<sup>9</sup>
- Prior to the creation of the Florida County Court Jail Diversion Program, the recidivism rate among people with mental illnesses in jails was approximately 70 percent. The rate was reduced to 18 percent in the first year of the program's operation and dropped an additional 2 percent in the next year. Under the program, misdemeanor defendants suffering from mental illnesses who are taken to the jail have their charges and mental health histories reviewed. If the defendants meet the program's eligibility criteria, they are diverted to a community mental health facility for appropriate treatment within 24 to 48 hours after their arrest.<sup>10</sup>
- In the late 1990s only a few court-based programs identifying themselves as mental health courts were accepting cases. By June 2006, 113 mental health courts were operational.<sup>11</sup>
- Defendants in the mental health court in Broward County (FL) were twice as likely to receive services for their mental illnesses, were no more likely to commit a new crime, and spent 75 percent fewer days in jail compared to defendants with similar mental health diagnoses and criminal charges who did not participate in the mental health court.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Correctional Association of New York. (2004). *Mental Health in the House of Corrections: A Study of Mental Health Care in New York State Prisons*. New York, New York: Wynn, J. R. & Warner, G.

<sup>8</sup> Internal Kansas Department of Corrections statistic. (2004). Kansas application for technical assistance to the Council of State Governments and the National Institute of Corrections.

<sup>9</sup> Circuit Court of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of Florida. (2004). *Final Report of the Miami-Dade County Grand Jury*. Available at [http://www.miamisao.com/publications/grand\\_jury/2000s/gj2004s.pdf](http://www.miamisao.com/publications/grand_jury/2000s/gj2004s.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Survey of Mental Health Courts. (2005). Retrieved from [www.mentalhealthcourtsurvey.com](http://www.mentalhealthcourtsurvey.com). The Survey of Mental Health Courts is a web-based project jointly administered by the GAINS Center for People with Co-occurring Disorders in the Criminal Justice System, NAMI, the TAPA Center for Jail Diversion, and the Consensus Project.

<sup>12</sup> Boothroyd, R.A., Poythress, N.G., McGaha, A., & Petrila, J. (2002). The Broward Mental Health Court: process, outcomes, and service utilization. *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26: 55-71.