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Policy Analysis on the Effectiveness of Mental Health Courts



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Abstract

The objective of this research is to examine the effectiveness of mental health courts in reducing recidivism rates with mentally ill offenders. A systematic review of studies was conducted to assess the impact that mental health courts have in reducing recidivism. This research found these courts to be effective in reducing recidivism as well as being an effective means of intervention for mentally ill offenders.

Introduction

- Deinstitutionalization and the lack of treatment options for mentally ill offenders.
- Offenders with mental illnesses were cycling in and out of the criminal justice system (Rossman, Willison, Mallik-Kane, Kim, & Sherrill, 2012).
- The issue of mentally ill offenders being overrepresented in the criminal justice system resulted in the creation of Mental Health Courts in 1997 in Broward County, Florida.
- Mental Health Courts were first developed and designed to divert defendants with serious mental illnesses from traditional criminal courts and get them the treatments they need (Appelbaum, 2016).
 - improve the quality of life for mentally ill offenders
 - increase public safety,
 - introduce offenders to community treatment resources
 - reduce recidivism

Studies Demonstrating Effectiveness

- Favorable outcomes (Steadman, Redlich, Callahan, Robbins, & Vesselinov, 2011)
 - 447 individuals in Mental Health Courts
 - 600 individuals in traditional criminal courts.
- Treatment (Snedker, Beach, and Corcoran, 2017)
 - 129 adults who participated in Mental Health Courts and exited



Studies Demonstrating Ineffectiveness

- Non completers of mental health courts (Ray, Hood, & Canada, 2015)
 - 63.7% of defendants' charges were dismissed,
 - 21.0% received probation
 - 15.3% were sentenced to incarceration
- Comparison of changes of symptoms in offenders in mental health courts and those in traditional court (Mercado, Poythress, Christy, & Petrla, 2005)
 - 116 defendants from mental health court
 - 101 defendants from regular court.

Summative Analysis

- Research has found that Mental Health Courts are an effective as well as ineffective means of reducing recidivism.
 - Significant reduction in criminal recidivism
 - Effective means of intervention
 - Non completers of the treatment program
- Influences on effectiveness
 - Gender & race (Kothari, Butkiewicz, Williams, Jacobson, Morse, & Cerulli, 2014)
 - Geographics (Han 2020)

Conclusions

- This policy was created in response to deinstitutionalization, which led to a significant number of mentally ill individuals being released from mental hospitals, where many of these individuals ended up homeless or in situations where treatment was unavailable (Amadeo, 2020).
- Overall, the research regarding the effectiveness of mental health courts has supported the argument that mental health courts are effective at reducing criminal recidivism of mentally ill offenders

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