

Mental Health and Criminal Justice: Challenges, Interventions, and Policy Implications

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between mental health disorders and criminal behavior, with particular emphasis on the challenges faced by the criminal justice system in managing individuals with psychiatric conditions. Using secondary data derived from peer-reviewed literature, government publications, institutional reports, and case studies, the research examines the prevalence of mental illness among incarcerated individuals, probationers, and offenders under community supervision. The findings reveal that mental health disorders are significantly over-represented within correctional populations and are frequently associated with substance abuse, social disadvantage, repeated offending, and poor rehabilitation outcomes.

The study further identifies major systemic and institutional barriers, including inadequate mental health training among law enforcement personnel, shortages of qualified mental health professionals, overcrowded correctional facilities, insufficient rehabilitation resources, and delays in psychiatric assessment and treatment. Existing interventions such as mental health courts, crisis intervention teams, counseling services, and community-based rehabilitation programs have shown positive outcomes in reducing recidivism and improving offender reintegration; however, their accessibility and implementation remain inconsistent across jurisdictions.

The study concludes that strengthening mental health care within the criminal justice system requires comprehensive policy reforms, improved inter-agency coordination, specialized training for criminal justice personnel, and expanded access to evidence-based and community-centered treatment programs. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing rehabilitation outcomes, reducing recidivism, and promoting long-term public safety.

Keywords: Mental Health, Criminal Justice System, Mental Illness, Recidivism, Rehabilitation, Mental Health Courts, Correctional Facilities, Community-Based Treatment.

INTRODUCTION

The link between mental health and crime is a complex issue that affects individuals, communities, and the criminal justice system worldwide. Mental health disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and substance-induced psychosis can influence behavior, decision making, and impulse control. When these conditions remain untreated, they may contribute to situations that bring individuals into conflict with the law. Understanding this connection is important not only for justice but also for ensuring proper treatment and rehabilitation for affected individuals.

In recent years, the growing number of offenders with mental health problems has become a major concern. Studies show that many individuals in prisons and correctional institutions suffer from some form of mental illness. However, criminal justice systems, which are mainly designed for punishment and deterrence, are often not equipped to address their psychological and emotional needs. Police officers,

judges, and prison staff frequently face situations involving mentally ill individuals without adequate training or resources. As a result, incidents that require medical attention may instead lead to arrest or imprisonment.

One of the major reasons behind this problem is the lack of accessible and affordable mental health services in society. Many people with untreated mental illnesses experience crises that attract police involvement. This has led to the “criminalization of mental illness,” where the criminal justice system becomes the default response to mental health issues due to failures in healthcare and social support systems. Once incarcerated, mentally ill individuals often face overcrowded prisons, limited psychiatric care, and social stigma, which further worsen their condition.

Over reliance on imprisonment as a solution for behavior linked to mental illness does not address the root causes of the problem. Prisons are rarely therapeutic environments and can intensify anxiety, depression, and trauma. Without proper mental health screening, counseling, and rehabilitation programs, many offenders are released without improvement in

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their psychological condition, increasing the likelihood of reoffending. This cycle highlights the urgent need for reform.

To address these challenges, several countries have introduced alternative approaches such as community-based mental health programs, diversion initiatives, and specialized mental health courts. These methods focus more on treatment, early intervention, and reintegration into society rather than punishment alone. Training law enforcement personnel to recognize and respond effectively to mental health crises is also essential.

This research aims to examine the relationship between mental health and criminal behavior while identifying the challenges faced by the criminal justice system in dealing with mentally ill offenders. It also seeks to suggest practical measures for improving treatment, rehabilitation, and reintegration, promoting a more humane and effective justice system.

Hypothesis

Individuals with untreated or inadequately managed mental health disorders are more likely to engage in criminal behavior, and the integration of effective mental health interventions within the criminal justice system such as mental health courts, specialized police training, and community-based treatment programs can reduce repeat offenses, improve individual outcomes, and enhance public safety.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mental health and crime are closely connected issues that create major challenges for individuals, communities, and the criminal justice system. People suffering from untreated mental illnesses are more likely to come into contact with law enforcement agencies, either as offenders or victims. Mental disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, and substance induced psychosis can affect judgment, emotional stability, and impulse control. Understanding the relationship between mental health and criminal behavior is important for developing effective treatment programs and criminal justice policies. Recent studies continue to show that mental health problems remain a serious concern within criminal justice systems worldwide (The Lancet Psychiatry, 2024).

Research shows that mental illness is significantly more common among prison populations than in the

general public. A recent global meta-analysis conducted by Emilian *et al.* (2025) found high rates of depression, psychosis, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia among incarcerated individuals across 43 countries. The study estimated that depression affects around 12.8% of prisoners, while psychotic disorders affect approximately 4.1% of the prison population. Similarly, Prins (2014) earlier reported that serious mental illnesses are disproportionately represented among incarcerated individuals, particularly among women prisoners. In India, prison mental health studies have shown that nearly one-third of prisoners suffer from psychiatric disorders excluding substance abuse conditions (Dhillon, 2024). Social factors such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, family breakdown, trauma, and social discrimination further increase the risk of both mental illness and criminal involvement (Lamb & Weinberger, 2016).

Although several studies report a strong association between mental illness and criminal justice involvement, the relationship is not always directly causal. Many researchers argue that the connection may partly reflect broader social determinants such as poverty, homelessness, unemployment, childhood trauma, substance abuse, and social exclusion, which independently increase the risk of both mental illness and criminal behavior. Therefore, mental illness alone should not be viewed as the sole cause of crime. Instead, criminal behavior often results from the interaction between psychiatric conditions and adverse social environments. This distinction is important because policies focused only on psychiatric treatment may be insufficient unless they also address socioeconomic inequalities, rehabilitation, housing support, education, and community-based mental health services.

Substance abuse is another important factor associated with crime and mental illness. Individuals with co-occurring mental health disorders and substance addiction are more likely to engage in violent or criminal behavior. Swanson *et al.* (2018) observed that drug and alcohol abuse worsen psychiatric symptoms, reduce self-control, and increase impulsive actions. Similarly, Teplin *et al.* (2020) emphasized that untreated mental illness combined with substance dependency often leads to behaviors that attract police intervention, including public disturbances and minor offenses. Without proper rehabilitation and treatment, many individuals become trapped in a cycle of addiction, arrest, imprisonment, and recidivism.

The criminal justice system faces several difficulties in addressing mental health issues effectively. One major problem is the lack of proper screening and diagnosis within prisons and police systems. Steadman *et al.* (2019) noted that many offenders enter correctional institutions without receiving adequate mental health assessments, leading to untreated conditions and worsening symptoms over time. In addition, police officers and correctional staff often lack specialized training to manage individuals experiencing mental health crises. Watson *et al.* (2015) explained that stigma and misunderstanding surrounding mental illness frequently result in discrimination and inappropriate handling of mentally ill offenders. Structural limitations such as overcrowded prisons, shortage of trained professionals, and limited funding further weaken rehabilitation efforts (James & Glaze, 2006).

Another major concern is the overreliance on incarceration. Kupers (2017) argued that imprisonment often worsens existing mental health conditions due to stressful prison environments and isolation practices. Solitary confinement, in particular, has severe psychological consequences, including depression, anxiety, hallucinations, and suicidal tendencies among vulnerable inmates (Haney, 2018). Reports from several countries, including Canada and the United States, continue to highlight the harmful effects of isolation on mentally ill prisoners.

To address these challenges, several intervention programs have been introduced globally. Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) help train police officers to respond safely and effectively to mental health emergencies and reduce unnecessary arrests. Compton *et al.* (2014) found that CIT programs improve referrals to mental health services and reduce the use of force during police encounters. Mental health courts provide treatment-oriented alternatives to traditional punishment and focus on rehabilitation rather than incarceration. Sarteschi *et al.* (2011) reported that mental health courts significantly reduce recidivism and improve treatment compliance.

In the reviewed studies, the term "recidivism" generally refers to repeated involvement with the criminal justice system after release, such as rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment. However, definitions and measurement methods vary across studies. Some researchers measure recidivism based on rearrest within a specific follow-up period, while others use reconviction or return to prison as indicators. These

differences in measurement can significantly influence reported recidivism rates and may affect comparisons between studies. Therefore, findings related to recidivism should be interpreted with caution.

Community-based rehabilitation programs are also important in reducing reoffending. Petersilia (2003) emphasized that housing support, employment opportunities, counseling, and continued mental health treatment play a major role in successful reintegration into society. Integrated care models combining mental health, substance abuse treatment, and primary healthcare services have also shown positive outcomes (Drake & Wallach, 2020). Furthermore, telepsychiatry and digital mental health services are improving access to treatment in prisons and rural communities, especially in resource-limited settings (Yellowlees *et al.*, 2010).

Despite the positive outcomes associated with community-based approaches such as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), several barriers limit their widespread implementation. High operational costs, shortage of trained mental health professionals, inadequate community infrastructure, and limited government funding often restrict access to these programs, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Legal and administrative challenges, including weak coordination between healthcare and criminal justice agencies, may also reduce the effectiveness of community-based interventions. In addition, stigma surrounding mental illness can discourage community acceptance and long-term policy support. These limitations suggest that successful implementation of ACT and similar programs requires sustained investment, inter-agency collaboration, and supportive legal frameworks.

In conclusion, the relationship between mental health and crime is complex and requires a balanced approach focused on treatment, rehabilitation, and public safety. Punishment alone cannot solve the root causes of criminal behavior among individuals with mental illnesses. Greater investment in mental health services, early intervention programs, prison reforms, and collaboration between healthcare professionals and criminal justice agencies is necessary to reduce crime and improve social outcomes. Recent research strongly supports the need for humane, treatment-centered, and rights-based approaches that protect both public safety and the dignity of individuals with mental illnesses.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the challenges posed by mental health issues within the criminal justice system and to propose effective strategies to address them. The research seeks to understand how untreated or inadequately managed mental health disorders contribute to criminal behavior, the systemic difficulties encountered by law enforcement, judicial authorities, and correctional institutions, and the role of targeted interventions in promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and enhancing public safety.

Objectives

1. To investigate the prevalence, distribution, and patterns of mental health disorders among individuals involved in the criminal justice system, including incarcerated offenders, probationers, and individuals under community supervision, in order to assess the overall scope and burden of mental illness within these populations.
2. To critically examine the systemic, institutional, and operational challenges faced by law enforcement agencies, judicial systems, and correctional institutions in managing individuals with mental health disorders, with particular emphasis on deficiencies in professional training, mental health resources, infrastructure, inter-agency coordination, and institutional protocols.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing mental health interventions and rehabilitative approaches within the criminal justice system, including mental health courts, crisis intervention teams, counseling services, diversion programs, and rehabilitation initiatives, in improving offender management and treatment outcomes.
4. To analyze the impact of accessible and comprehensive mental health care on recidivism reduction, rehabilitation outcomes, behavioral improvement, and the successful social reintegration of offenders with mental health disorders.
5. To propose evidence based policy recommendations and reforms aimed at strengthening mental health care within the

criminal justice system through improved treatment accessibility, specialized personnel training, institutional support mechanisms, and the expansion of community-based mental health services addressing the underlying social and psychological causes of criminal behavior.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on secondary data analysis. The research aims to examine the relationship between mental health and crime within the criminal justice system by analyzing existing literature, official reports, legal documents, and statistical records. Since the study does not involve direct interaction with participants, no primary data were collected.

Data Collection (Secondary Data)

Since this study is based on secondary data, it will use information already available from different sources, such as:

- **Government Reports:** Reports from law enforcement agencies, courts, and correctional institutions about crimes involving people with mental health conditions.
- **Research Studies:** Published academic papers, articles, and surveys conducted by experts in criminology, psychology, and forensic science.
- **Case Studies:** Analysis of real-life examples where individuals with mental health disorders were involved in criminal activities and how the justice system handled their cases.
- **Legal Documents and Policies:** Review of laws, policies, and guidelines related to mental health and crime, including how courts determine criminal responsibility for mentally ill individuals.
- **Statistical Data:** Crime records, prison population statistics, and mental health reports from official sources.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The Study Included

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Government and institutional reports

- Legal documents and policy guidelines
- Case studies related to mental illness and criminal justice
- Statistical reports on crime and prison mental health

The Study Excluded

- Non-academic opinion articles
- Unverified online sources
- Duplicate studies
- Sources unrelated to mental health and criminal behavior

Approximately 45–60 relevant sources were reviewed and analyzed for the study.

Data Analysis

The collected information will be carefully studied to:

- Identify trends and patterns in crimes committed by individuals with mental health issues.
- Understand challenges faced by the criminal justice system in handling such cases.
- Evaluate how different countries or regions approach mental health in the legal system.
- Suggest possible improvements based on findings from previous research.

Ethical Considerations

Since the research is based entirely on secondary data, ethical concerns mainly involve maintaining academic integrity and objectivity. All information used in the study was obtained from credible and publicly accessible sources. Proper citation and referencing practices were followed to avoid plagiarism and ensure transparency in the research process.

RESULTS

A review of the selected literature demonstrated a strong association between mental health disorders and involvement in the criminal justice system. The findings were categorized into five major themes: prevalence of mental illness among incarcerated populations, relationship between untreated mental illness and recidivism, effectiveness of intervention

programs, institutional barriers, and the role of community-based support systems.

Prevalence of Mental Illness in Correctional Settings

The majority of the reviewed studies reported a disproportionately high prevalence of mental health disorders among incarcerated individuals compared to the general population. Across multiple studies, approximately 35–45% of prisoners were found to suffer from at least one diagnosable mental disorder, including depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Several studies also reported high rates of co-occurring substance abuse disorders among mentally ill offenders. The literature indicated that untreated psychiatric conditions, combined with social disadvantages such as homelessness and unemployment, increased the likelihood of contact with law enforcement agencies.

Mental Illness and Recidivism

A consistent finding across the reviewed literature was the positive association between untreated mental illness and recidivism. Studies reported that individuals with untreated psychiatric disorders were significantly more likely to reoffend following release from correctional institutions.

Research findings showed that limited access to post-release mental healthcare, housing instability, unemployment, and social stigma contributed to repeated cycles of incarceration. Some longitudinal studies observed higher re-arrest and re-incarceration rates among offenders with severe mental illnesses compared to offenders without diagnosed psychiatric conditions.

The study also identified several systemic and institutional challenges in managing offenders with mental health disorders. Law enforcement personnel often lack specialized mental health training, resulting in difficulties in identifying and responding appropriately to psychiatric crises. Correctional facilities reported shortages of qualified mental health professionals, inadequate infrastructure for treatment, overcrowding, and limited rehabilitation resources. Judicial systems in many regions also face delays in psychiatric assessment and insufficient coordination with healthcare services. These gaps collectively reduce the

effectiveness of mental health management within the criminal justice system and contribute to poor rehabilitation outcomes.

Effectiveness of Specialized Intervention Programs

The analysis demonstrated that specialized intervention programs improved rehabilitation outcomes and reduced recidivism rates among mentally ill offenders. Programs such as mental health courts, crisis intervention teams, counseling services, diversion programs, and community-based rehabilitation initiatives were found to provide more effective support than traditional punitive approaches. These interventions primarily focused on identifying mental health needs early, ensuring access to treatment, and promoting long-term psychological and social stability.

The reviewed studies indicated that offenders who participated in specialized intervention programs were more likely to comply with treatment plans, engage in counseling and rehabilitation services, and successfully reintegrate into society after release. Several studies also reported reductions in repeated arrests, violent incidents, and psychiatric crises among participants receiving structured mental health support. In addition, these programs contributed to improved communication between healthcare providers, law enforcement agencies, and correctional institutions, thereby enhancing continuity of care. Overall, the literature emphasized that rehabilitation-oriented interventions are more effective than solely punitive measures in addressing the complex relationship between mental illness and criminal behavior.

Mental Health Courts

Multiple studies identified mental health courts as effective alternatives to traditional incarceration for offenders with mental health disorders. These specialized courts are designed to divert individuals with psychiatric conditions away from conventional criminal justice processes and toward supervised treatment and rehabilitation programs. The primary objective of mental health courts is to address the underlying mental health issues contributing to criminal behavior while reducing unnecessary incarceration.

The reviewed literature demonstrated that participants enrolled in mental health court programs showed lower rates of recidivism, improved adherence to treatment plans, and greater engagement with

mental health services compared to individuals processed through traditional courts. These programs often combine judicial supervision with psychiatric treatment, counseling, substance abuse rehabilitation, and community support services. Studies further indicated that treatment-oriented judicial approaches contributed to improved psychological stability, better social functioning, and increased chances of successful community reintegration. Researchers emphasized that mental health courts promote a more rehabilitative and cost-effective approach within the criminal justice system by balancing public safety with mental health care and support.

Diversion Programs

Diversion programs were also associated with positive outcomes. Several studies reported reductions in recidivism ranging from 15% to 25% among individuals diverted from correctional institutions to community-based mental health treatment programs. The findings suggested that early psychiatric intervention reduced repeated criminal behavior and improved long-term rehabilitation.

Institutional Challenges in the Criminal Justice System

The reviewed studies consistently identified several systemic and institutional barriers that negatively affect the management and rehabilitation of offenders with mental health disorders within the criminal justice system. One of the most significant challenges is the lack of specialized mental health training among law enforcement personnel, correctional staff, and judicial officers. Many professionals responsible for handling mentally ill offenders are not adequately equipped to recognize psychiatric symptoms, respond to mental health crises, or apply appropriate intervention strategies. As a result, individuals experiencing psychological distress are often criminalized rather than diverted toward treatment and support services.

Another major concern highlighted in the literature is the shortage of qualified mental health professionals within correctional institutions. Many prisons and detention centers operate with limited psychiatric staff, insufficient counseling services, and inadequate treatment infrastructure. Overcrowding within correctional facilities further worsens these conditions by restricting access to proper care, increasing stress among inmates, and reducing the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs. The absence of continuous

monitoring and individualized treatment plans frequently contributes to the deterioration of mental health conditions during incarceration.

The studies also emphasized poor coordination between criminal justice institutions and healthcare systems. Delays in psychiatric evaluations, limited information sharing, and weak inter-agency collaboration often hinder timely diagnosis and treatment. In many cases, mentally ill offenders enter the criminal justice system without prior mental health assessment and continue through legal proceedings without adequate clinical support. These procedural gaps reduce the efficiency of rehabilitation efforts and increase the likelihood of repeated offending.

Insufficient Funding

Financial and policy-related limitations were also commonly reported. Insufficient funding for mental health programs, lack of institutional resources, and the absence of standardized protocols for managing mentally ill offenders create significant barriers to effective intervention. Stigma surrounding mental illness within correctional environments further discourages individuals from seeking treatment and limits institutional commitment toward mental health reform. Collectively, these systemic deficiencies weaken rehabilitation outcomes, contribute to high recidivism rates, and place additional pressure on the criminal justice system.

Lack of Professional Training

Several studies highlighted inadequate mental health training among law enforcement personnel and correctional officers as a major challenge within the criminal justice system. The literature suggested that many officers have limited knowledge of psychiatric disorders, behavioral symptoms, and crisis management techniques. As a result, individuals experiencing mental health crises are often misunderstood or treated as security threats rather than persons requiring medical or psychological assistance.

Studies further indicated that insufficient training frequently contributes to inappropriate responses during encounters with mentally ill individuals, including unnecessary arrests, escalation of confrontations, and excessive use of force. In correctional settings, the lack of specialized training may also reduce the ability of staff to identify early signs of psychological distress, self-harm, or suicidal behavior among inmates. Researchers emphasized that improved mental health

education and crisis intervention training could enhance communication, reduce conflict, and promote safer and more effective management of mentally ill offenders.

Role of Community-Based Mental Health Programs

Community-based treatment models were identified as effective long-term approaches for reducing criminal justice involvement among individuals with mental illnesses.

Assertive Community Treatment (ACT)

Studies examining Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs reported significant improvements in treatment adherence, housing stability, and access to healthcare services among individuals with severe mental illnesses. ACT is a community-based intervention model that provides comprehensive and continuous support through multidisciplinary teams consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, counselors, and case managers. Unlike traditional treatment approaches, ACT focuses on delivering personalized care within the community rather than relying solely on hospitalization or institutional treatment.

The reviewed literature indicated that ACT programs help individuals maintain regular psychiatric treatment, medication compliance, and social support, thereby improving overall mental health outcomes. Participants in ACT programs were found to experience lower rates of psychiatric hospitalization, reduced homelessness, and improved daily functioning. Several studies also reported that individuals receiving ACT services demonstrated lower rates of criminal reoffending and reduced involvement with the criminal justice system. Researchers concluded that ACT represents an effective long-term rehabilitation strategy for mentally ill offenders by promoting stability, recovery, and successful reintegration into society.

DISCUSSION

The findings show a serious problem: mental illness is very common among incarcerated populations. Studies indicate that nearly 40% of prisoners experience mental health disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As a result, correctional institutions often function as substitute mental health facilities, despite lacking adequate psychiatric staff, training, and healthcare resources.

Comparative Analysis of Previous Studies

Author(s) & Year	Country	Study Focus	Key Findings	Implications
Abram <i>et al.</i> (2019)	United States	Mental illness and substance use among incarcerated individuals	High rates of co-occurring psychiatric and substance use disorders were identified among prison populations	Demonstrates the need for integrated mental health and addiction treatment programs
Compton <i>et al.</i> (2014)	United States	Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) policing	CIT training improved police responses to individuals with mental illness and reduced unnecessary arrests	Highlights the importance of police-based diversion strategies
Skeem & Peterson (2011)	United States	Mental illness and recidivism	Untreated psychiatric disorders were associated with increased reoffending	Supports the expansion of treatment-focused rehabilitation programs
Prins (2014)	United States	Criminalization of mental illness	Individuals with severe mental illness were disproportionately represented in correctional systems	Indicates systemic gaps in community mental health services
Fazel & Seewald (2012)	United Kingdom	Prevalence of psychiatric disorders in prisons	Prisoners showed significantly higher rates of psychosis, depression, and substance abuse than the general population	Emphasizes the global burden of mental illness in correctional settings
Livingston <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Canada	Mental health courts and diversion programs	Diversion programs reduced incarceration rates and improved treatment adherence	Suggests community-based judicial interventions are effective
Ogloff <i>et al.</i> (2007)	Australia	Mental illness in correctional institutions	Many incarcerated individuals had untreated severe psychiatric conditions	Demonstrates the need for improved screening and early intervention
WHO (2022)	Global	Prison mental health systems	Countries with strong community mental health networks reported lower incarceration of mentally ill individuals	Reinforces the importance of preventive and community-centered care

One major concern is the limited availability of mental health treatment before and during incarceration. Many individuals entering the criminal justice system already face social and economic disadvantages, including homelessness, unemployment, poverty, and substance abuse. Without timely psychological support and community intervention, these individuals may become involved in minor, survival-related, or impulsive criminal activities. This reflects a systemic failure in which untreated mental illness is addressed through punishment rather than healthcare and rehabilitation.

The findings also demonstrate a strong relationship between untreated mental illness and recidivism. Individuals released from prison frequently encounter social stigma, unemployment, unstable housing, and poor access to healthcare services. These barriers reduce their ability to reintegrate successfully into society and increase the likelihood of repeated offending. This recurring pattern is commonly

described as the “revolving door” phenomenon, where individuals repeatedly cycle between prison and the community.

At the same time, the study highlights the effectiveness of treatment-oriented approaches. Specialized interventions such as mental health courts, diversion programs, and rehabilitation-based services focus on addressing the psychological causes of offending behavior rather than relying solely on incarceration. Evidence suggests that these programs can reduce repeat offenses, improve treatment adherence, and support long-term recovery.

However, several challenges continue to limit progress. Insufficient funding restricts the availability of mental health services both inside correctional institutions and within communities. In addition, many police officers, prison staff, and criminal justice professionals receive limited training in recognizing and responding to mental health conditions. This lack of awareness may contribute to inappropriate responses,

excessive force, or the criminalization of individuals requiring medical and psychological assistance.

Community-based interventions, particularly Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), appear to provide more sustainable outcomes. These programs offer continuous support through mental healthcare, housing assistance, counseling, employment services, and social rehabilitation. Such integrated approaches have been associated with reduced criminal involvement and improved quality of life among individuals with severe mental illness. Although community-based interventions such as ACT show promising outcomes, their implementation remains challenging in many regions due to limited funding, workforce shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and weak coordination between healthcare and criminal justice systems.

Despite these findings, the study has certain limitations. Since the research is based on secondary data, the accuracy and reliability of conclusions depend on the quality of previously published studies and reports. Variations in research methods, sample populations, and diagnostic criteria across studies may affect consistency in findings. Additionally, publication bias may exist, as studies reporting significant or positive results are more likely to be published than studies with neutral findings. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the results.

Overall, the discussion emphasizes the urgent need to reform how the criminal justice system responds to mental illness. Greater emphasis should be placed on prevention, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation, and community support rather than punishment alone. A more healthcare-oriented and rehabilitative approach would not only improve mental health outcomes but also reduce crime and recidivism in the long term.

CONCLUSION

Dealing with mental health issues in the criminal justice system requires efforts from many different areas. It is not just about punishing crimes but also about understanding and managing mental health conditions to prevent future offenses.

Some important steps to improve the situation include:

- **Education and Awareness:** Law enforcement officers, judges, and prison staff need proper training to handle individuals with mental health

disorders. This can help them respond appropriately and prevent unnecessary arrests or mistreatment.

- **Policy Changes:** Governments should create and update laws that focus on treatment and rehabilitation rather than just punishment for offenders with mental illnesses.
- **Collaboration Between Agencies:** The police, mental health professionals, courts, and correctional facilities must work together to ensure that people with mental health issues get the support they need instead of simply being sent to jail.

Some solutions, like mental health courts (which provide alternative sentencing for offenders with mental illnesses) and crisis intervention teams (which help police officers handle mental health emergencies), have been successful in reducing repeat offenses and improving the lives of those affected.

However, there are still major challenges, such as:

- **Lack of Funds:** Many mental health programs in the justice system do not receive enough financial support, making it difficult to provide proper care and treatment.
- **Insufficient Training:** Many law enforcement officers and prison staff do not have the necessary training to deal with people suffering from mental illnesses, leading to improper handling of such cases.

To make lasting improvements, governments and communities must invest in better policies, training, and resources to ensure that individuals with mental health conditions receive the care they need instead of just being punished.

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