Law Enforcement and the Mentally Ill: A Pathfinder

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American psychiatric hospitals began discharging severely mentally-ill patients under the policy known as deinstitutionalization in the early 1970s. Released back into neighborhoods in ever greater numbers, difficult encounters between the mentally unstable and community residents soon became increasingly common.

Over the past three decades, law enforcement has also undergone a paradigmatic shift. It has moved away from a traditional reactive model to one based on a concept called community-oriented policing. Community-oriented policing continues to be the policy of the majority of policing agencies today. Its key elements, problem-solving and the creation of partnerships with local stakeholders, provide the theoretical and practical underpinnings for the development of atypical techniques for handling potentially dangerous confrontations with those suffering from mental illness. This population is commonly known to law enforcement as EDPs, or Emotionally Disturbed Persons.

Scholarly research finds that fear of an inextricable link between mental illness and violence remains a concept firmly held by the general public, thus the belief that the mentally disordered are dangerous continues to dominate mental-health policy across the country. Given these circumstances, law enforcement will continue to find itself the first responder to calls involving EDPs for the foreseeable future.

Research on the plight of the deinstitutionalized mentally ill and law enforcement’s role in managing this population is well documented in the literature of mental health, social work, law enforcement and public policy. This pathfinder has been created as a guide for locating relevant articles, books, statistics and reports both online and in print that examine police interaction with the mentally ill. Some materials might also be found under other topics, such as police training, community-oriented policing, deinstitutionalization, community mental health, first responder, and crisis intervention.
A search strategy that uses these descriptors as keywords or in combination as phrases linked by **AND** or **OR** will yield successful results.

**Encyclopedias**

The following are encyclopedias where you may find information on the broad topics of community policing, deinstitutionalization and mental illness.


http://www.sage-ereference.com


http://sage-ereference.com/lawenforcement/


**Recent Books**

A keyword search is the most productive search strategy for finding books on the police and the mentally ill in the CUNY+ catalog. Try keywords such as *police, law enforcement* and *crisis intervention* combined with *mental illness, mental disorders, mental disabilities* and *mental health* using **AND** or **OR**. Clicking on the book’s record will provide subject headings which you might use to find other related materials.


Recent Journal Articles

The following electronic databases will provide you with an abundant number of scholarly and non-scholarly articles from the fields of psychology and criminal justice on mental illness and law enforcement:

- Criminal Justice Abstracts
- Criminal Justice Periodical Index
- PsycARTICLES
- PsycINFO
As with books, the best search strategy for these databases is one that uses keywords or phrases. Try using some of these terms in the table below and linking them with **AND** or **OR**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mentally ill or mentally ill offenders</th>
<th>mental health services</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mental disorders</td>
<td>legal processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>police personnel</td>
<td>crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>psychopathology</td>
<td>intervention</td>
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</tbody>
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Below is a bibliography of scholarly and non-scholarly journal articles from 1999 to 2008 retrieved from the Criminal Justice Periodical Index, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. These databases are available through the Sealy Library home page.


2008, from Criminal Justice Periodicals database.


Van Blaricom, D.P. (2000, March). Handling the mentally ill: There are no shortcuts for


Dissertations and Theses

Another electronic source you may want to utilize is the Proquest Dissertation & Theses database. This database contains an enormous number of works on this subject, including those on the history of caring for the mentally ill in the United States, the politics behind deinstitutionalization, the efficacy of community policing in general and its relevance to the issue of the mentally disordered in particular. Below are selected dissertations and theses that may provide you with additional background information and place into context milestone events in the evolution of public policy. To find documents in this database, search by using keywords and phrases including mental health, mental illness, law enforcement, community policing, nonlethal weapon, taser and deinstitutionalization.


**Online Reports and Resources**

Here is a list of articles, reports and websites from online journals, public health agencies and private organizations that will provide you with further information on mental illness and police response.


Talking to “invisible” people: How to communicate with the mentally ill in times of crisis. (2006, March). Retrieved March 27, 2008, from
http://www.officer.com/publication/printer.jsp?id=26209