

Psychiatric diagnoses and multiyear criminal recidivism in a Canadian provincial offender population

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Abundant research confirms a high prevalence of substance use and mental disorders in correctional samples. It is unclear, however, how these contribute to the risk of repeat offending. The present study examined offense trajectories within a Canadian Provincial offender population (N = 31,014), and observed that offenders with non-substance-related mental disorders were at no greater risk of recidivism than those with no diagnosis. In contrast, odds of recidivism were significantly higher among those with substance use and/or co-occurring disorders. These findings add strength to the emerging conclusion that non-substance-related mental disorders are, as a group, less likely to predict recidivism than substance use disorders. Notably, nearly 50% of repeat offenders had a physician-diagnosed substance use disorder in the 5 years prior to their index offense. Results are discussed in relation to the necessity for targeted evidence-based partnerships between health and corrections sectors that are responsive to both public health and safety.