

## Recidivism Outcomes for Suburban Mental Health Court Defendants

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**Abstract** Mental health courts have recently emerged as one means to reduce the number of persons with mental illness in the criminal justice system. Using a post-test only comparison group design, this study examined rearrest rates for 1 year post discharge among three groups meeting admission criteria for a municipal mental health court. The rearrest rate of defendants who successfully completed the program ( $N=351$ ) was 14.5%, compared to 38% among defendants negatively terminated from the program ( $N=137$ ), and 25.8% among defendants who chose not to participate ( $N=89$ ). This positive result held even when controlling for a range of variables in a Cox regression survival analysis. Factors associated with rearrest are identified for each of the three groups.

**Keywords** Mental health court · Recidivism · Mentally ill offenders · Diversion

### Introduction

Large numbers of persons with mental illness have entered the criminal justice system in the United States. James and Glaze (2006) reported that 15% of a sample of inmates in state prisons and 24% of jail inmates reported at least one symptom of a psychotic disorder, and Steadman et al. (2009) reported that among a sample of jail inmates 14.5% of males and 31% of females had a serious mental illness. Many persons with mental illness do not adjust well to incarceration in jails and prisons, which can exacerbate psychiatric symptoms and create management difficulties

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