

COMMUNITY-BASED ALTERNATIVES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS

Review of the Relevant Research

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Community-based alternatives to conviction and imprisonment for adult offenders with severe mental illness are receiving increasing attention from researchers and policy makers. After discussing the justifications that have been offered in support of community-based alternatives, this article reviews the current empirical evidence relevant to such alternatives. The authors use the sequential intercept model as a guide and summarize the existing research at several points along the criminal justice continuum. They conclude by highlighting the gaps in existing research and discussing the need for further research in several key areas.

Keywords: community-based alternatives; sequential intercept model; offenders; severe mental illness

Our society has legitimate interests in prosecuting and incarcerating criminal offenders. At the same time, however, there is growing attention to community-based alternatives to conviction and imprisonment of certain subgroups of individuals who are involved in offending. One of these subgroups is adults with severe mental illness.¹ This article provides a review of the current empirical evidence relevant to community-based alternatives to the prosecution of individuals with severe mental illness. We begin by summarizing the justifications that have been provided for such alternatives. Next, using the sequential intercept model (Munetz & Griffin, 2006) as a guide, we summarize the existing research on diversion (prior to conviction) and postincarceration return to the community. Finally, we discuss the gaps in existing research and identify the implications for further research needs in light of this summary.

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