



## Short Communication

## Factors predicting substance dependence and psychotropic medication use among offenders in community corrections

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## ABSTRACT

Co-occurring substance abuse and mental illness is prevalent among criminal offenders, but little is known about risk factors for these co-occurring disorders (COD) in community corrections population. To identify risk factors for COD in community corrections offenders, we analyzed assessment data from 5,595 offenders maintained under community supervision at a substance use diversion program. Three groups, offenders with substance use disorders who were taking psychotropic medications (SUPM), offenders with a substance use disorder (SUD) only and controls were compared. Logistic regressions were used to identify predictors of SUPM versus SUD only and controls. SUPM status was predicted by being White or Female, having some medical insurance (private or government aided), being unemployed, prior history of abuse/trauma, and prior history of suicidal ideation or behavior.

Offenders with substance use disorders and co-occurring psychiatric problems face salient social risk that may need to be targeted through integrated services.

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## 1. Introduction

Substance misuse is more prevalent and pervasive among criminal offenders with a mental health diagnosis than those with no history of mental illness (James & Glaze, 2006; Taxman, Cropsey, Melnick, & Perdoni, 2008). Co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders (COD) have direct implications for criminal behavior—over a third of inmates with mental health problems were under the influence of drugs at the time of offense.

Most studies on COD in corrections have been conducted in institutional settings, despite higher rates of mental health problems in community corrections settings (Gunter, Philibert, & Hollenbeck, 2009). In a recent review, 48% of community corrections offenders reported speaking with a mental health professional about emotional problems or taking psychotropic medications (Gunter et al., 2009). As the vast majority of criminal offenders in the U.S. are maintained under community supervision, it is important to understand the risk factors and implications of COD in these settings (Glaze & Bonczar, 2008; Taxman, Perdoni, & Harrison, 2007).

Existing literature suggests that multiple factors may distinguish between COD offenders versus those without these diagnoses, including prior history of trauma, limited education, more sparse employment

histories, higher suicide risk, and a tendency toward violent offending (McNeil, Binder, & Robinson, 2005; Sacks, 2004; Sacks & Pearson, 2003; Sacks et al., 2009). However, it is not clear whether these or other factors characterize COD offenders in community corrections settings. Thus, the present study aimed to identify factors that distinguished community corrections offenders with substance use diagnoses and maintained on psychotropic medications (SUPM) from offenders who endorsed a substance use disorder only (SUD only) and those who were neither diagnosed with a substance use disorder nor taking psychotropic medications (controls).

## 2. Method

## 2.1. Participants and procedures

From 2002 to 2007, a total 24,365 men and women charged with felonies in Jefferson County, Alabama reported to Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities (TASC) as a condition of bond. At their initial visit, they completed an intake interview. Approval from the Institutional Review Board was granted to examine de-identified data collected by TASC for the purposes of treatment planning and case management.

Approximately 7.5% ( $n=1845$ ) were identified as SUPM by meeting criteria for at least one Axis I substance use disorder and taking psychotropic medications at the time of the interview. Comparably sized sub-samples of those that met criteria for SUD only ( $n=1,876$ ) and those that did not meet either criteria

Abbreviations: COD, Co-occurring disorders; SUPM, substance users taking psychotropic medications; SUD only, substance use disorder only.

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