

Responding to Mentally Ill Victims of Crime

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Mental Health Division

Topics Covered

- I. Factors Leading to Law Enforcement Agencies forming mental health sections
- II. HPD's Mental Health Division
- III. The Mentally Ill and Violence Stigma
- IV. What Has Led to so many Mentally Ill Crime Victims?
- V. Consequences of Crisis
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FACTORS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF MENTAL HEALTH DIVISIONS

- Deinstitutionalization
- Homelessness
- Criminalization of the Mentally Ill
 - Single largest MH facility in US – L.A. County Jail (3,000+)
 - Single largest MH facility in Texas – Harris County Jail (2,400+) vs. (2,328 in Psych hospitals)
- Swat Scenes

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- The HPD Mental Health Division is located in the Houston Center for Sobriety.
- Houston has ~2261 Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) officers within the department; ~ 1606 are in **Patrol** responding to incidents involving the mentally ill.
- Last year, Houston Police responded to over 29,000 incidents involving mentally ill persons.

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- On average, every 2.5 hours, HPD officers detain a person who is in a mental health crisis and file an Emergency Detention Order.

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- Specialized Police Response: Crisis Intervention Response Teams (CIRT). – 10 full-time units (and working to get 3 more)
- Harris County Collaboration – HCSO CIRT
 - Began with 3 CIRT teams; now up to 6 CIRT teams
 - About to add an additional 3 units
- Chronic Consumer Stabilization Program (began as a Pilot in 2009; now a fully active program that has since doubled in size).

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- All new HPD officers complete 40-hours of CIT training as cadets (March 2007).
- Our CIT program uses professional, paid actors for our role-play scenarios.

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- The Mental Health Division also provides the following courses:
 - Annual 8-hour Advanced CIT (mandated for all HPD CIT Officers)
 - 8 Hour state mandated Intermediate CIT Refresher
 - CIT for HPD Jailers (8 hour pre-service; 4 hour in-service)
 - 16-hour CIT/Crisis Communications for HPD Tele-communicators
 - 8 hour CIT practicum ride-along with MCOT
 - 40-hour Mental Health Peace Officer(MHPO) for veteran officers

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- U.S. Council of State Governments Learning Sites Program
 - 1 of 6 Police Departments in the nation
 - Host site visits
 - Provide information on programs
 - Training for law enforcement and mental health providers across the state and nation
 - 2013 - 141 Agencies within 20 different states, as well as law enforcement personnel in Canada

Houston's Mental Health Crisis Response

- Boarding Homes Enforcement Detail (November 2013)
 - 1 Lead Officer, 2 additional investigative Officers, 1 Rotational Officer
 - Collaboration with APS, DADs and other community organizations

THE MENTALLY ILL AND THE STIGMA OF VIOLENCE

THE MENTALLY ILL AND VIOLENCE

■ When most people associate crime and mental illness they usually think of the mentally ill as perpetrators, not victims.



THE FACTS

■ When in reality, the mentally ill are victims far more often than perpetrators.

THE FACTS

■ “Most people who are violent do not have a mental illness, and most people who have a mental illness are not violent”

➤ Report to the President on Issues Raised by the Virginia Tech Tragedy, June 13, 2007

WHAT HAS LED TO SO MANY MENTALLY ILL VICTIMS OF CRIME???

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

- Over 500,000 in Mental Asylums in 1950's
- Development of medications
- Fewer than 50,000 in State Mental Hospitals today
- Community treatment
- Deinstitutionalization

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

- As a result, most persons with serious mental illness now live in the community, where they are at a greater risk of victimization.
- Most ended up in less-desirable parts of urban areas living in halfway houses and group homes.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

- These places tend to be located in poor, crime-ridden parts of town without the political clout to keep them out.
- Example: 5th Ward vs. Kingwood, Magnolia Glen.
- They have become small asylums hidden in the community.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

- In our enthusiasm for every mentally ill person, however vulnerable, to live in the community, we have overlooked the need to protect them .

CONSEQUENCES OF THIS MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- It is estimated that nearly 3 million severely mentally ill people are crime victims each year in the U.S.

(Northwestern University)

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- More than ¼ of persons with serious mental illness are victims of violent crime in the course of a year, a rate 11 times higher than the general population!

(Northwestern University Study)

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- Mentally ill are six times more likely to be murdered than the general population.
- Males with schizophrenia and people with affective psychosis (severe depression with delusions and hallucinations) have even higher rates of being murdered.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- The mentally ill have higher death rates from suicide and accidents.
- Mentally ill drug users have the highest rates of suicide for all categories.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- Victimization rates vary with the type of violent crime. People with serious mental illness are:
 - 8 times more likely to be robbed
 - 15 times more likely to be assaulted
 - 23 more times to be raped

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- Theft of property from persons, rare in the general population at 0.2 percent, happens to 21% of serious mentally ill, or 140 times as often.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- Greater victimization rates can often be attributed to lifestyles and environment.
- Many of the mentally ill are poor, live in low-income and high crime areas.
- Many are preyed upon because of their mental illness.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- Many of the mentally ill have low IQ's along with their mental illness and become easy targets of criminals.
- Mentally ill persons often become victims of fraud/scams involving their government disability checks and their medications.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- In Houston, we have a major problem with a scam called “scripting”.
- We also have a problem with the mentally ill being taken advantage of at day labor centers.

TRAGIC CONSEQUENCES

- DEADLY ENCOUNTERS WITH POLICE
 - People with mental illness kill law enforcement officers at a rate 5.5 times greater than the rest of the population.
 - People with mental illness are killed by police at a rate nearly 4 times greater than the general public.
 - Nearly 1/3 of all persons killed by police are severely mentally ill.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Crimes committed against mentally ill are often labeled as abuse and neglect (rather than assault, rape, or murder), which understates the victimization problem.
- Very common at personal care homes, group homes, psych facilities.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Many mentally ill victims may not report crimes because of their dependence on the abuser for basic survival needs.
- When victims do report crimes, police may not take the person's allegations seriously or may be reluctant to get involved.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Be aware of false stories that may result from their illness, delusion, hallucinations, etc...
- Some typical allegations are: sexual assaults, poisoning, stalking, government oppression.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Both male and females with mental illness often make outlandish claims of sexual assault. Claims of being raped by invisible persons, dead persons, God, people in the attic, etc....
- It is important to take these claims seriously and to look for any clues that there may be some truth in the story.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Often, those interviewing the person just blow the person off as being "crazy".
- Most often, there is no truth in the allegations.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Over last several months, HPD has been dealing with one severely mentally ill lady who claims to be raped by invisible men.
- No evidence but has completed 8 sexual assault exams in last 6 months at a cost of \$600 each to HPD.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- As frustrating as these situations may be, we still train our officers to listen closely to the allegations and document them in an offense report.
- There is a chance that a seemingly unbelievable story may be true.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- One elderly lady with dementia made several calls to HPD with claims of being raped at night by a man living in her attic.
- Because of her dementia, officers did not take her claims seriously.
- One officer took the initiative to look in her attic and found evidence of someone living there.
- An investigation was conducted and the suspect was arrested. He had been living in her attic for almost 6 months!

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- As victim service providers, you should work closely with your local police department, District Attorney's office, and other mental health professionals.
- When you are working with a mentally ill person who makes a claim of being a victim of a crime, never hesitate to notify the police...no matter how outrageous the claim.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Case Example: Paranoid schizophrenic female who claimed her children, ages 2, 5, & 8 were being sexually abused by her husband.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- This case is a perfect example of someone who was experiencing paranoia and delusions because of her illness, but was still able to provide information outside of their illness or false beliefs.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Listen to their story as if it were fact...then probe, ask questions, speak to family members, and others to help determine the veracity of the story.
- If the person appears to be hearing voices, ask about it, it may be a vital piece of the story.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- If you aren't comfortable interviewing the person due to their actions or illness, ask someone to assist you.
- Often HPD detectives will experience this while conducting interviews and contact MHU for advice.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- If you are taking a recorded statement or interrogating a mentally ill victim or suspect, ensuring their rights are protected is of utmost importance.
- It is recommended that a guardian, mental health caseworker or legal representative be present to protect the rights of the mentally ill.

REPORTING PROBLEMS

- Case Example of U/H professor's wife

COMMUNICATION TIPS

IN CONCLUSION

- Take the time to listen...
- Take the time to validate...
- Take the time to care.
