

The Importance of Early Substance Use to Mental Health Treatment Completion

by
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Abstract

This study intends to look at the specific relationship between early substance use, or more specifically the age of first substance use, and treatment completion. It is predicted that early ages of first substance use will be a useful predictor of treatment completion.

Introduction

By 2009, there were approximately 5 million people in community-based supervision in the United States alone (Glaze, 2010). Community correction is a term that includes, but is not limited to, probation, parole, and treatment. Probation has become a more prevalent alternative to prison in the past few decades (Webster 2010). However, much is still being learned about the difficulties probationers have and the most effective ways to treat them. For instance, two thirds of the individuals on probation have reported past substance abuse (Mumola 1998) and half a million probationers have some form of mental health problem. Furthermore, almost 80 percent of individuals with some form of a mental health illness also have a known or reported substance abuse problem (Hartwell 2004), thus illustrating the high rate of comorbidity of these two problems. More specifically, a study found that 58% of probationers were found to have concurrent psychiatric illness along with drug abuse (Hiller, Knight, & Simpson 1996).

The chances are high of a probationer with a substance abuse problem also having a mental illness. However, it is not always seen or recognized. The study by Haegedorn and Willenbring (2003) found that almost 50% of probationers had not been previously identified as having a psychiatric illness, although they did that overlooked fact could negatively impact their recovery from substance dependence. This is potentially very problematic because the rates of psychiatric illness in individuals in the criminal justice system can be 2 to 5 times greater than the general population. And of those samples, 60-80% have a history of substance abuse.

The issues of individuals in the criminal justice system with mental health issues, substance abuse problems, or possibly a combination of both, bring about the subject of treatment. It was found that programs that are specifically designed to treat offenders with mental illness were successful in reducing symptoms of distress. Also, the programs designed to meet criminal justice and psychiatric needs specifically produce substantial reductions in psychiatric outcomes and criminal justice recidivism (Morgan, Flora, & Steffan, 2011).

An important part of treatment research with t

Hiller, M. L. (1996). An assessment of comorbid psychological problems in a residential criminal justice drug treatment program. *Psychology of*

