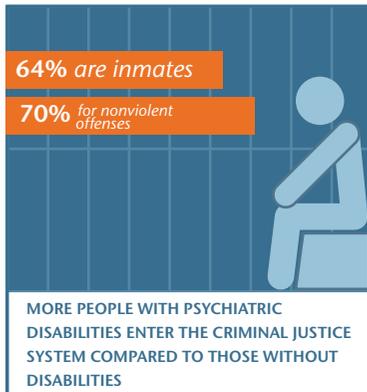


Pathways to Justice[®]: *Get the Facts*

Psychiatric Disabilities



Psychiatric disabilities are conditions that may disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Examples of psychiatric disabilities include:

- ▶ Major depression
- ▶ Schizophrenia
- ▶ Bipolar disorder
- ▶ Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)
- ▶ Panic disorder
- ▶ Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- ▶ Borderline personality disorder

Psychiatric disabilities can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income level.¹

Facts

- ▶ One in four adults – approximately 61.5 million Americans – experiences a psychiatric disability in a given year.²
- ▶ The criminal justice system is becoming the new mental health system.
- ▶ A national study from 2002 to 2004 estimated that 56% of state prisoners, 45% of federal prisoners, and 64% of jail inmates had a psychiatric disability.³
- ▶ 70% of people with a psychiatric disability are serving time for nonviolent offenses.⁴
- ▶ Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training is an option for police officers who are interested in educating themselves to properly intervene in a situation with a person with a psychiatric disability.



National Center on
Criminal Justice & Disability

For more information, visit our
website at:

www.thearc.org/NCCJD

Contact us:

Phone: 202.433.5255

Toll free: 800.433.5255

Email: NCCJInfo@thearc.org



[facebook.com/NCCJD](https://www.facebook.com/NCCJD)

Mental Health Crises

People with psychiatric disabilities are more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system compared to those without disabilities, and their disability is more likely to be identified by police and others in the criminal justice system when they are experiencing a mental health crisis. People with psychiatric disabilities who have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder or are homeless are at a particularly high risk for encountering law enforcement. Some signs of a mental health crisis may include:

- ▶ Hearing voices, seeing things that others do not see, or paranoia
- ▶ Threats to harm self or others

Psychiatric Disabilities Fact Sheet

- ▶ Poor personal hygiene, unusual behavior, disorganized thinking or speech
- ▶ Inappropriate expression of feelings, including hostility, indifference, or inability to express oneself⁵
- ▶ Psychiatric disabilities alone do not increase the risk of violence
- ▶ Psychiatric disability is generally unrelated to intelligence level
- ▶ With proper support and treatment, most people with psychiatric disabilities can experience recovery

Communication Tips

- ▶ Choose one person to speak with the individual
- ▶ Anyone who interacts with the person should introduce himself or herself, clearly identify his or her role, and keep his or her voice calm and quiet
- ▶ Do not argue with people who are having hallucinations or delusions; hallucinations and delusions are very real to people experiencing them. Instead, reflect back the person's feelings ("I can see that you are really upset. Can I help with anything?")
- ▶ Keep a respectful distance to help the person feel more comfortable
- ▶ Consider "watchful waiting" if there is no immediate sign of danger to the person or others⁶
- ▶ Ask yes or no questions ("Do you need help getting to the doctor?" NOT "Who should I call? Your doctor, your mom or your therapist?")
- ▶ Repeat yourself if necessary

Resources

Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
www.bazelon.org/

National Alliance for Mental Illness
www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=legal_support

National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice
ncmhjj.com/about-us/overview/

SAMHAS's GAINS Center for Behavioral Health and Justice Transformation
gainscenter.samhsa.gov/

¹http://www.nami.org/Template.cfm?Section=By_Illness

²http://www.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness_factsheet.pdf

³James & Glaze. (2006). Mental Health Problems of Prison and Jail Inmates. US Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report.

⁴People with Seirous Mental Illnesses in the Criminal Justice System. (2002). Fact Sheets for Advocates. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.

⁵http://www.mlive.com/health/index.ssf/2011/01/signs_of_a_mental_health_crisis.html

⁶<http://store.samhsa.gov?shin?content//SMA09-4427.pdf>