

## **Mental Health and the Criminal Justice System: A Review on the Mental Health Diversion Programs and Their Effectiveness in Reducing Recidivism**

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**Abstract :** According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, a person experiencing a mental health crisis is more likely to encounter law enforcement than crisis intervention or treatment. People with mental illness are overrepresented in incarceration, often resulting in exacerbation of the symptoms and increasing the likelihood of recidivism and rearrest. To address the issue of the large number of people with mental illness cycling through the criminal justice system, mental health courts and diversion programs were established. Mental health diversion programs are considered as more appropriate options for offenders whose mental illness is significantly contributing to their criminal offenses. However, these programs are controversial, with criticism that offenders may view the programs as the only way to get treatment or to avoid jail time. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of mental health diversion programs. More specifically, it examines how these programs may reduce recidivism compared to incarceration. Materials presented in this review were selected from forensic and general psychology journals. Additional policy documents, government reports, and court records are also included for discussion. The results suggest that mental health diversion programs are overall more successful in intervening compared to incarcerations. The recidivism rates for program participants are lower. However, individual factors do contribute to the outcome of the programs.

**Keywords :** diversion programs, forensic psychology, justice system, mental health courts, mental illness, rearrest, recidivism

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