Euro Mental Health 2017- Improving Outcomes for Criminal Offenders with Serious Mental Illness- Lorena Fulton- Ohio University Zanesville

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Abstract

This qualitative study used an action research design and an appreciative inquiry methodology. The key purpose of this study was to innovate collaborative processes between the Mental Health Court and mental health service providers as they work together to design new strategies to reduce recidivism among adult offenders with serious mental illness. This study followed a pragmatic approach that allowed for evolving assumptions about the causes that influence the outcomes. The stakeholders in this study were legal professionals and mental health service providers. Individual interviews, focus groups, and a survey were used to explore effective ways to help offenders with serious mental illness to coexist successfully in the community and avoid further incarceration. The outcome of this research was an improvement in collaboration between stakeholders to ensure successful transition from jail to the community, for offenders with serious mental illness. This collaboration removed barriers to avoiding recidivism and re-incarceration among adults with serious mental illness and improved policy and procedure followed by the mental health service providers and court professionals.

Introduction

The purpose of this appreciative inquiry project was to innovate collaborative processes between the Mental Health Court (MHC) and mental health service providers, particularly as they work together to design new strategies to reduce recidivism among adult offenders with serious mental illness. The study objective was to reduce recidivism among criminal offenders with serious mental illness. The study included legal professionals and mental health service providers. A survey, individual interviews, and focus groups were used to explore effective ways to help offenders with serious mental illness to coexist successfully in the community and avoid further incarceration. This study was prompted by observations from a community prisoner review team that found people with serious mental illness often struggle more than their counterparts to overcome legal involvement and chronic incarceration. The results from this study will be useful to improve outcomes for offenders with serious mental illness.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to reduce recidivism through improving outpatient mental health service delivery for criminal offenders with serious mental illness. The courts also have a responsibility to advocate for this vulnerable population. This appreciative inquiry led to better collaboration between the legal system and the mental health service system. Participating stakeholders included attorneys, city police supervisors, and mental health service providers. The desired outcome of this research was to increase engagement in outpatient services so that defendants will spend more time in the community and less time incarcerated.

The data collection and analysis process was designed to analyze information in the interest of creating a strategy for positive change with respect to improving collaboration between the legal and mental health service systems on behalf of offenders with serious mental illness.

Instruments

A Likert-scaled survey titled "What are mental health service providers' perceptions of how the county Mental Health Court can increase engagement in outpatient services so that defendants will spend more time in the community and less time incarcerated" was developed (Appendix A). According to Stringer and Dwyer [18], interviews and focus groups are effective tools, as they were primary entry points into an action research process, and because they help to support the research group's focus on inclusion and problem solving strategies by those most affected by an issue.

Results and Discussion

The key purpose of this study was to reduce recidivism through a process of collaboration between the MHC and mental health service providers as they work together to design new strategies to reduce recidivism among adult offenders with serious mental illness. This study followed a pragmatic approach that allowed for evolving assumptions about the causes that influence the outcomes. Through brainstorming and sharing "big ideas," this study applies AI to help facilitate improved processes that will help offenders with serious mental illness to avoid frequent incarceration. Legal professionals, mental health service providers, and professionals from the Adult Probation department were utilized as stakeholders. Individual interviews, focus groups, and a survey in an AI were utilized to explore effective ways to help offenders with serious mental illness to coexist successfully in the community and avoid further incarceration

Through the use of the survey, focus was improved for the individual interviews and focus group meetings. The survey helped to define perceptions about strengths and limitations

associated with collaboration between the mental health service delivery and the legal system (Appendix A). The individual interviews helped to develop three broad themes around recidivism and the mental health system, and the focus groups helped move the analysis through an action research approach to action planning. There was general agreement in previous research [3,4,6] that offenders with serious mental illness find it more difficult to navigate the criminal justice system and that coordination between the outpatient mental health services and the judicial systems help to reduce recidivism rates among this population.

Conclusions

The intent of the study was to increase collaboration between the two systems so that expectations placed on the defendant are consistent between the judicial and mental health treatment plans. The study validated the assumption that collaboration between the systems results in a united approach to reducing community crime and improving the quality of life for offenders with serious mental illness. Results of this project include action steps for this community to increase knowledge of other system goals, roles, and responsibilities and to combine individual case and system-to-system collaboration in the interest of duplicable and sustainable collaboration that improves outcomes for individuals and communities.

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