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Law Enforcement and the Mentally Ill: Thirty Years of Police Literature

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This study applies the methodology of content analysis to 30 years of law-enforcement literature to determine whether online access to scholarly research in social work and mental health made a difference in police policy toward the mentally ill. Keywords from the controlled vocabulary of these fields were found in the body of content analyzed prior to easily accessible online resources in 1997, yet the number of articles on the subject grew from approximately one per year prior to 1998 to nearly five per year by 2011. The imprint of these two fields from outside of law enforcement was discernible in the best practices followed by police agencies.

KEYWORDS content analysis, law enforcement, mental illness, community policing, deinstitutionalization

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Mental illness is so prevalent in our society today that an estimated 25 percent of all adults in the United States suffer from a diagnosable psychological disorder, and nearly 50 percent will develop at least one during their lifetime. In fact, mental disorders are so common that they are considered the leading cause of disability in the United States and Canada for people between the ages of 15 and 44. According to the World Health Organization, mental illness results in more disability in developed countries than any other group of illnesses, including cancer and heart disease (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011).

The Mayo Clinic (2011) defines mental illness as types of mental disorders that affect mood, behavior, or thought, and result in distress and a reduced ability to function socially, psychologically, interpersonally, or occupationally (The Mayo Clinic 2011). There are cultural differences as to which behaviors determine a diagnosis of mental illness. But the prevalence of depression in countries throughout the world, and the occurrence of schizophrenia in estimates that range between approximately 0.5 percent and 1 percent of the population worldwide, gives credence to the idea that mental illness has a common biological basis in humankind (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2011).

Fear that mental illness is inextricably linked to violence remains a concept firmly held by the general public (Pescosolido et al. 1999, 1341; Corrigan et al. 2002, 296). Historically, communities have shown little tolerance for the demonstrably mentally ill, particularly when their acting out includes frightening or disturbing behavior. During the past three decades, handling emotionally disturbed persons, henceforth referred to as EDPs, has fallen increasingly to law enforcement (Watson et al. 2010, 303).

Studies cited by Watson and her colleagues in the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* (2008) indicate that up to 6 percent of individuals considered suspects by police suffer from a serious mental illness, with medium and large police agencies estimating that 10 percent of their contacts with the public involve those with psychiatric disorders.

While contact with the mentally ill is a part of policing and always has been, the advent of deinstitutionalization has forced an evolution in law enforcement's duties and responsibilities toward this group. As public policy, deinstitutionalization aimed to return psychiatric patients from inpatient hospitalization to communities where out-patient treatment would be made available (Markowitz 2011). The failure of that goal has instead led to the emergence of a difficult and vulnerable population.

Community-Oriented Policing

The policing strategy called community-oriented policing that is practiced by law enforcement agencies both in the United States and abroad is based on two seminal pieces of research published in 1979 and 1982.

Problem-oriented policing was proposed in 1979 by Professor Herman Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin School of Law as an alternative to the reactive-technique model of traditional law enforcement. Goldstein observed that many of the problems police are called upon to solve are social and behavioral problems that arise from the community itself. Often, they are of a non-criminal justice nature. Given these observations, Goldstein proposed that patrol officers—who had insights into community issues that perhaps their superiors did not—be allowed more discretion in resolving chronic complaints. Law enforcement agencies were encouraged to examine the factors underlying these problems. By resolving those, police could end the cycle of repeat calls for service to the same area, or calls about the same type of disturbance (Vaughn 1992; Kelling 2005).

In 1982, the *Atlantic Monthly* published criminal-justice scholars James Q. Wilson and George Kelling's article on their "broken windows" theory. They posited that a neighborhood that looks uncared for eventually erodes and is soon plagued by more serious crimes than graffiti and other petty delinquencies. It was their work that eventuated in the strategy of community-oriented policing (Weiss 2006, 11–12, 27).

The primary tenet of community policing is that police become proactive problem solvers while still attending to the tasks of traditional law enforcement: calls for service, making arrests, and deterring crime (Pelfrey 2004). In the period between the signing of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and 2004, some \$11.3 billion in grants to 12,000 law enforcement agencies had been dispersed through the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community-Oriented Policing. More than 18,000 community police officers were put on the street and in schools (Weiss 2006, 13).

Under community-oriented policing, law enforcement had found itself edging closer to what has traditionally been considered the purview of social workers and psychologists (Williams 1996; Boutilier 2000, 363). The operational strategy combines traditional, reactive law enforcement with a proactive approach that seeks to solve problems in the community before they rise to the level of criminality. This is accomplished through equitable partnerships with municipal, state, and federal agencies, private organizations, and clergy and community leaders (Scheider, Chapman, and Schapiro 2009; Thacher 2001). These community-policing protocols have allowed for the creation of programs that deal directly with EDPs and seek to divert those in crisis to psychiatric intake facilities and away from arrest.

Crisis Intervention Training

Created by the Memphis, TN, Police Department in 1988 following a deadly force incident involving an EDP armed with a knife, the agency's Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program has been adopted by more than 1,000 sites in the United States and overseas (Lord et al. 2011, 390). Briefly, selected officers undergo 40 hours of specialized training in mental health issues. At least two CIT officers are on duty each shift so that at least one is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In collaboration with local mental-health authorities, emergency psychiatric services include a no-refusal drop-off facility and/or a mental health mobile crisis team that can assist officers during CIT calls (Lord et al. 2011, 390).

Police response to the mentally ill is believed to be enhanced, in addition, by the forging of law-enforcement partnerships with mental health community resources and “shifting police roles and organizational priorities from an exclusively traditional law enforcement model that reluctantly dealt with persons with mental illness to a more service oriented model that responds to mental illness as a community safety and public health concern” (Watson et al. 2008, 361). The Memphis, TN, Police Department’s Crisis Intervention Team, or CIT, is perhaps the most-widely replicated initiative for handling EDP calls for service. The CIT strategy, which was created with the help of the city’s mental-health professionals, has been widely adopted by departments across the country. Evidence shows that its effect on outcomes for EDPs has been positive (Watson et al. 2010, 316).

With a growing number of encounters between the deinstitutionalized mentally ill and law enforcement came the need for information on mental health. Database searches on police use of the Internet indicate that law enforcement has been an avid user of computer technology since the late 1990s. The profession quickly realized how useful the Internet could be in fighting crime—particularly online child pornography and fraud. One early study of Internet use by police found that by 1997, officers were already logging onto law-enforcement sites. The Internet “was used as a medium for information exchange regarding policies, procedures and practices” (Pitaneelaboot 1997, 27).

But while police agencies are technologically capable of making use of open-access journals and scholarly research in social work and mental health, there is little if any academic research to show that they do. Studies on information-seeking behavior by law enforcement, or of the profession’s information literacy skills, are scant (Kilic 2010, 6). As noted, the vast majority of academic writing on police and the Internet focuses almost exclusively on how law enforcement uses cyberspace as a crime-fighting tool. The discovery of the lack of data in this critical area opens the door to further research on this subject.

Yet terms from the mental health and social work professions have appeared regularly in law-enforcement literature since at least 1981. Information on mental illness and its manifestations has been a topic for law-enforcement trade journals for the past 30 years, along with information on best practices in dealing with those who suffer from psychiatric illnesses.

Assuming that police interaction with the mentally ill has continuously developed between 1981 and 2011, and that advances in technology and information science have made knowledge more available and accessible to all fields, including law enforcement, this study asks the following questions:

- How have the accessibility and availability of information from the mental health and social work fields revealed themselves in the literature on police practices with regard to mentally ill subjects?
- Which format, print or online, has been used most often to make this information accessible and available to law enforcement?
- How are better outcomes in calls for service involving mentally ill subjects described by law-enforcement literature? Have these better outcomes for EDPs increased?

This study is concerned with an analysis of the articles on response to EDPs published by trade journals for the field of law enforcement, reports by law enforcement organizations, and studies by federal agencies on policing issues over the past 30 years. It seeks evidence of the influence of mental health and social work fields. It does not address documents that speak to the specific problem of homelessness among the mentally ill, or to texts that address the specific problem of people who suffer from both mental illness and substance abuse. It also does not address the issue of incarcerated mentally ill offenders.

METHODOLOGY

This research study analyzes 92 articles drawn from law enforcement literature. The investigator had access to the Lloyd Sealy Library at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. In addition to its subscription databases, the Sealy Library's holdings include print and microfilm versions of the older trade journals used for this project. This was particularly true of those published prior to 1993. The 92 items selected for this project were accessed using the Criminal Justice Periodical Index (CJPI) electronic database, the National Criminal Justice Reference Service, the PsychEXTRA database, and the website Officer.com. Articles were selected by doing a topical search of the databases and website. Only those that came from trade journals, and not scholarly periodicals, were utilized. Within that designation, articles were chosen on the basis of relevance to the subject matter. Excluded were items that pertained to EDPs and the correctional system, to EDPs who were also substance abusers, and to police problems with EDPs who were homeless. The investigator tried to provide articles from journals that represented professional law-enforcement organizations, such as the Police Executive Research Forum, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Association of Police Officers, independent publishers, and studies and reports from federal agencies. An even distribution was also a goal in terms of representing professional levels of law enforcement, such as articles by or about chiefs, managers, and patrol officers. Furthermore, the investigator tried to provide an even distribution of branches of law enforcement, including federal, state, and municipal agencies.

This study has a number of independent and dependent variables. The first hypothesis, which posits that greater access to information from the fields of social work and mental health has influenced police response to the mentally ill, uses calls for service as its independent variable. The controlled vocabularies from Sociological Indexing Terms and PsychINFO Thesaurus, the electronic databases that index scholarly work from the two social science fields, serve as dependent variables. By analyzing the effect of these variables on calls for service, the study is able to address how this influence was manifested, which field had the greater influence, and whether information available online or in print made the greater impact.

In the second hypothesis, that these changes in response by police have resulted in better outcomes for EDPs, the independent variable is the outcome of police encounters with the mentally ill. The dependent variable is the possible results of such interactions. An analysis of the data shows what law enforcement considers a better outcome, and whether these better outcomes have increased for EDPs.

Coding Sheets

The research instrument used to collect data is a coding sheet that tracks controlled vocabulary from mental health and social work. Reading each item in the sample, the investigator records each time a phrase from these vocabularies is used, making it possible to determine how this influence reveals itself. Data collected from this checklist determine whether acquisition of language has occurred, and if so, when it began, which field's terminology is used most frequently by law enforcement, and which terms are most prevalent in the content being analyzed. By recording the dates of the items in the sample in the bibliographic section at the top of each coding sheet, it is possible to determine whether the information could have been online at the time of publication, thereby answering the question of whether print or online media had the larger influence. This checklist is Appendix A.

The checklist and table in Appendix B were created to track how often each of 15 possible outcomes of a police encounter with an EDP is mentioned in the sample; thus, it is possible to answer how law enforcement describes these better outcomes, and which are considered the best results.

Though it was not used to answer any research questions, a checklist was used to determine whether the author of an item was a sworn officer or a non-sworn contributor to the publication; whether the publication was an independent journal or published by a law enforcement organization; whether its content concerned municipal, county, or federal jurisdiction; and whether nonlethal weaponry was discussed, particularly the use of TASERs. This information was used to establish the authenticity of each item. The reference list for the sample used in this study is given in Appendix C.

Limitations

Limitations might arise in terms of the availability of controlled vocabulary for the fields being searched, social work, and mental health. Moreover, bias in the description of law enforcement policies by articles written by or for that field might surface.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis was selected as the research methodology for this project because of its singular capability of providing the framework for both tracking the migration of language from one field to another and for revealing biases in the data from which inferences about a particular subject may be drawn. In their study, White and Marsh (2006, 41) characterize content analysis as a "systematic, rigorous approach to analyzing documents obtained or generated in the course of research." Data, in this context, must be able to provide useful evidence for answering research questions and testing hypotheses. In citing Krippendorff (2004), Marsh and White add that an essential element of the body of content being analyzed is that it communicates a message from a sender to a receiver.

Krippendorff (1980, 171) says that the connection between the data and the target of the analyst's inferences "may be very tenuous." Indeed it is "rarely strong and obvious." However, the reason for analyzing mass communications is because it

is more than just entertaining, it is a powerful molder of opinion. This research consists of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of articles on police encounters with EDPs published by trade journals, law enforcement organizations, and federal agencies, intended for practitioners in the field of law enforcement. This type of literature profoundly influences and molds the protocols, policies, and philosophies held by the society of police both nationally and internationally.

As described by DiMaggio and Powell in their 1983 study, organizations in the same field will eventually become homogeneous. The process can occur through mimetic isomorphism (imitation), coercive isomorphism (the pressure of environmental factors), or normative isomorphism (professionalization). Law enforcement is particularly prone to mimetic isomorphism. Evidence shows that police agencies receive information about innovations, such as community policing or crisis intervention training, from one or more key agencies (Maguire and Mastrofski 2000, 9).

A 1997 survey of police managers in 182 municipal departments in cities of population more than 100,000, cited by Maguire and Mastrofski (2000), found that emulating peers, mediating the risk of civil liability, and communicating with professionals outside of their own departments were all associated with “higher levels of police department innovation.” These findings roughly correspond to mimetic, coercive, and normative isomorphism.

DEINSTITUTIONALIZATION

Deinstitutionalization describes a national social policy of discharging psychiatric patients from mental hospitals in the belief that they could be better cared for at community treatment facilities. Research suggests that the process has been a failure both for the psychiatrically disabled whose lives it was supposed to improve and for communities, where the presence of the mentally ill is feared by residents.

Arceri (1997, 46–50) finds that the drive to reintegrate the mentally ill into society represents a return of the values present in the moral treatment era of the 19th century when compassionate care was espoused by the medical profession and reformers. Just as the creation of mental hospitals was touted as an alternative to the cruel almshouses where the mentally ill were then housed, deinstitutionalization and the promise of a more fully integrated life for the mentally ill was heralded as an alternative to facilities that had become warehouses for this population.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld deinstitutionalization in 1972 in *Wyatt v. Stickney*. The Supreme Court found that mentally ill people were constitutionally entitled to treatment (Perez, Leifman, and Estrada 2003, 62). Before the community health movement, large numbers of the mentally ill were kept in state hospitals under deplorable conditions with little regard for their “health, safety or habilitation” (*Wyatt v. Stickney* 1972).

Both Arceri (1997) and Hochbaum (2002), whose research focuses on the 40-year process of deinstitutionalization in New York, note that patients released back to communities as part of this shift were not reintegrated. Discharged psychiatric patients remained dependent on Supplemental Security Income and Social Security. Both of these programs were key factors in the deinstitutionalization process, as was

the inclusion of the mentally ill under Medicaid and Medicare (Hochbaum 2002, 91–92).

Many of these people were housed in adult group homes after their release. When taking into account all institutions, including mental hospitals, group homes, and other traditional and nontraditional housing, the institutionalized mentally ill actually grew by 1 percent between 1950 and 1970 (Hochbaum 2002). In the wake of Wyatt, states began the process of deinstitutionalization not with the idea of improving mental health services, but as an opportunity to save money. The money saved when psychiatric hospitals shut down was not used to develop community-based outpatient facilities.

“The result has been nothing short of disaster. The states left an entire category of individuals with mental illnesses without adequate resources or treatment” (Perez, Leifman, and Estrada 2003, 63). The policy, according to Perez et al. (2003, 63), has caused a proliferation in the number of homeless and the incarceration of the psychiatrically disabled. Instead of deinstitutionalization, what has occurred is a reinstitutionalization of the mentally ill in penal institutions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FOR HYPOTHESIS I

Findings

Of the 92 items contained in the sample, the status of the author as either sworn or nonsworn personnel could be determined in 63 documents.

Eighteen items (28.5 percent) were written by law-enforcement officers, 9 (14.2 percent) by law-enforcement managers, 9 (6.3 percent) by police chiefs, and 32 (50.7 percent) by nonsworn contributors. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of author by status.

Twenty-four of the items in the entire sample, (32.6 percent), were published in journals that are official organs of law enforcement organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the FBI, and the National Association of Sheriffs. More than twice that amount, 59 (64 percent), were published in independent trade journals or police websites. Forty-four (47.8 percent) were intended specifically for the use of municipal police, and seven (7.6 percent) specifically for county law-enforcement officers.

The Presence of Controlled Vocabulary in Sample Items

Terms found in the controlled vocabulary of the social work and mental health fields were found in 80 of the 92 items. In all, controlled vocabulary was used 236 times. Thirty-nine words or phrases were used as variables, 20 from social work and 19 from mental health. Two of these terms—*disorders*

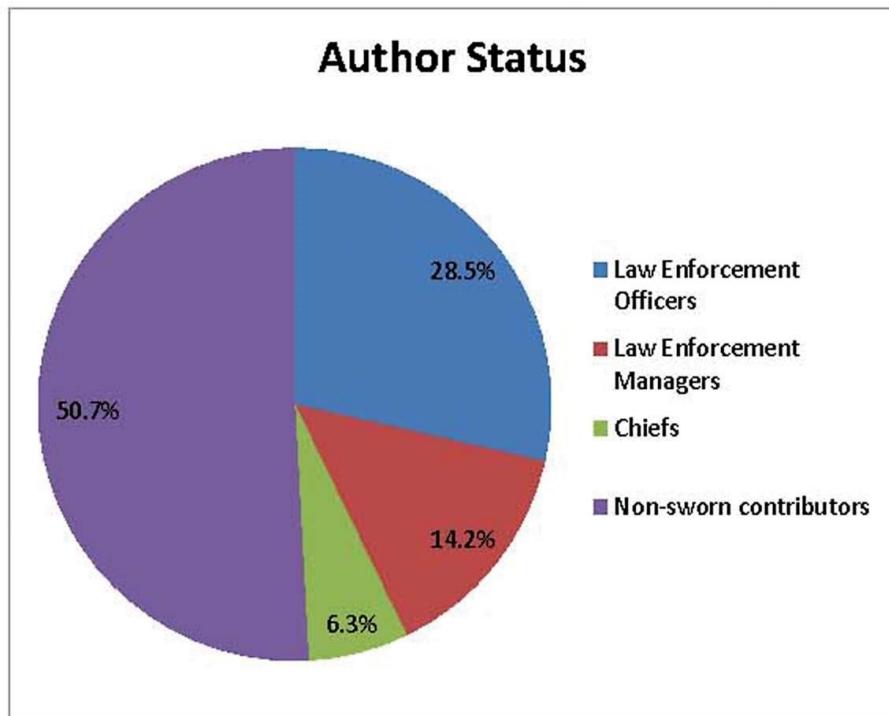


FIGURE 1 Breakdown of author status (Color figure available online). and *psychosis*—appeared in both vocabularies. Of the total number of terms, 29 (74 percent) appeared in the body of content being analyzed.

The terms used most frequently in the 80 items were *mental illness* and *schizophrenia*, which appeared 35 times (43.7 percent) and 29 times (36.2 percent), respectively. *Mental health* appeared 24 times or in 30 percent of the sample. *Disorders and depression* were used 14 times (17.5 percent). *Mental health services* was used in 15 percent of the sample, or 12 times, as was *crisis intervention services*. The terms *mental disorders* and *deinstitutionalization* each appeared 10 times (12.5 percent). *Emotionally disturbed* and *psychosis* were both used nine times (11.2 percent). *Community mental health* appeared eight times (10 percent) and *dementia* seven times (8.7 percent). *Personality disorder* was used six times, or in 7.5 percent of the sample. *Anxiety disorders*, *sociopathic personality*, and *paranoia* were used five times (6.2 percent). *Chronic mental illness*, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, and *mentally ill offenders* all appeared four times in the sample, as did *psychological assessment* (5 percent). The terms *anorexia nervosa*, *mental patient*, *psychopathology*, *affective disorders*, *impulse control disorder* and *emotional disturbances* were each used once (1.2 percent). Not used were the phrases *affective illness*, *comorbidity*, *health care utilization*, *psychiatric symptoms*, *social service utilization*, *dissociative disorders*, *schizoaffective disorders*, *antisocial behavior* and *community psychiatry*.

Greater Use of Social Work Terms

Of the two vocabularies, that which belongs to social work was used far more frequently than that belonging to mental health. Vocabulary from social work appeared more than twice as often in the sample as did vocabulary from mental health—159 times as compared to 77 times. Out of 80 items that used the vocabulary,

38 used vocabulary from either social work or mental health. Just 7 of those items used phrases exclusively from the vocabulary of mental health; 35 used terms exclusively from social work.

This study finds that law enforcement has been acquiring specific terms and phrases from the fields of social work and mental health for inclusion in its publications for the past 30 years. These words and phrases appeared in all types of articles contained in the sample, such as those that focused on hostage situations, crisis intervention, suicide, training, and model policies. In many cases, they were used as a glossary in items whose aim was instructive, that pertained to training, or that urged closer bonding with mental health professionals and social service agencies. Four items from the sample, two published in *Sheriff* and two in *Law & Order*, provide examples. In the item by DeShazor (2001), eight different terms and phrases are used in an article intended to teach practitioners on how to handle mentally ill persons who pay frequent visits to local sheriff's offices. The terms that appear include *psychosis*, *schizophrenia*, *mental disorders*, *affective disorders*, *anxiety disorders*, *dementia*, and *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. The article provides brief descriptions of each of these disorders and tips on how to recognize mental illness. Sanow (2004) discusses how proper training can reduce the risk for police liability suits under the Americans with Disabilities Act. It also uses eight terms, *psychosis*, *paranoia*, *community mental health*, *deinstitutionalization*, *schizophrenia*, *mental disorders*, *anxiety disorders*, and *dementia*, providing a brief description of each.

Both Zdanawicz (2001), and Weiss and Dresser (2000) call upon law enforcement to collaborate more closely with social service agencies. The former article uses five terms: *emotionally disturbed*, *mental health services*, *deinstitutionalization*, *schizophrenia*, and *emotional disturbances*; the latter one uses four terms: *mental illness*, *schizophrenia*, *anxiety disorders*, and *dementia*.

Peer-reviewed and scholarly journals are by definition written for an audience of highly educated researchers and experts. Conversely, trade journals are periodicals that attract a broader audience within a particular profession or industry. The content of the police trade journal combines how-to articles that address the practical side of law enforcement with features that showcase successful policies and programs. To this end, they purposely reprint reports and studies from government agencies and professional organizations. As the field continues its efforts to standardize best practices, these magazines offer the roughly 18,000 police agencies in the United States trends to follow and information on how to attain their goals (Alaska Justice Forum 2011). Therefore, it is highly significant that these specific terms from psychology and social work are appearing in the literature of law enforcement's practitioners. One may infer from this acquisition of language that the influence of these fields has been accepted not only in the academic realms of criminal justice, but by the world of practice.

Notable, as well, is the way in which the terms are utilized. While public knowledge abounds about common mental illnesses such as schizophrenia and depression, many of the articles—as mentioned—provide definitions and descriptions of these disorders. One conclusion that may be drawn, based on these findings, is that despite the accessibility of information and decades of contact with the mentally ill, police still have more to learn in this area. That conjecture is supported by the article “Officer Perceptions of Police Responses to Persons with a Mental Illness” (Wells and Schafer 2006), which found in a survey of Indiana police agencies

that officers felt at a disadvantage when encountering an EDP because they did not have enough knowledge of mental illnesses and their symptoms.

Presuming that those items written prior to 1997 were less likely to have relied upon online resources and those written after that year are more likely to have used information found on the Internet, the sample was divided into two groups, 1981 to 1997 and 1998 to 2011, in an effort to resolve the question of whether print or online sources were more influential on the field of law enforcement. While the trend toward Internet use had been growing during the 1990s, the year 1997 was chosen because it appeared to be a key year in terms of the Internet's popularity. A report by the U.S. Census of computer use in the United States in 1997 found that Internet use had grown from 22.8 percent in 1993 to 36.6 percent in the year of the study (U.S. Census 2013).

The sample yielded 25 items from 1981 and 1997, and 67 items from 1998 and 2011. In all, 1.56 items were published per year during the first period, and 4.78 items during the second period. In quantifying the controlled vocabularies, 67 terms were used by items in the first 16 years and 169 in the remaining years.

Yet despite the increase in the number of articles being written on the subject of EDPs and police, this only resulted in a minute increase in the average number of social work and mental health terms being used—2.4 terms per article written between 1981 and 1997, and 2.6 per article during 1998 and 2011. Though the number of items published on the subject has spiked and leveled over the past 30 years, social work terminology and mental health terminology have consistently appeared in these articles, studies, and reports intended for law-enforcement use. Figure 2 tracks the use of controlled vocabulary terms from both social work and mental health from 1981 to 2011. Series 1 shows the average number of terms; Series 2 shows the number of items published per year.

Discussion

Although far fewer articles on police and EDP interaction were written prior to widespread use of the Internet, social work terminology and mental health terminology did appear throughout the sample at nearly the same rate from 1981 to 2011. The consistency in the use of terminology over the period analyzed indicates that police have been acquiring words and phrases from mental health and social work through print. It is unlikely that online resources have played a significant role in the migration of terminology from these fields to law enforcement.

Indicative of the influence of the Internet, however, is the explosion in the number of articles, studies, and reports—nearly five items a year—since 1998. The greatest number of articles, studies, and reports on EDPs were published in 2000. Indeed, after 1998, many of the items in the sample were more easily accessible to anyone with an Internet connection. Issues of *Law & Order*, for example, were available only on microfilm prior to 1998. Given that police have been handling the deinstitutionalized mentally ill since the 1970s, and without knowledge of a national watershed event between 1998 and 2011 in law enforcement, the increase in the number of articles published on police contact with EDPs suggests that online access was a significant factor in driving the proliferation of items. The increase

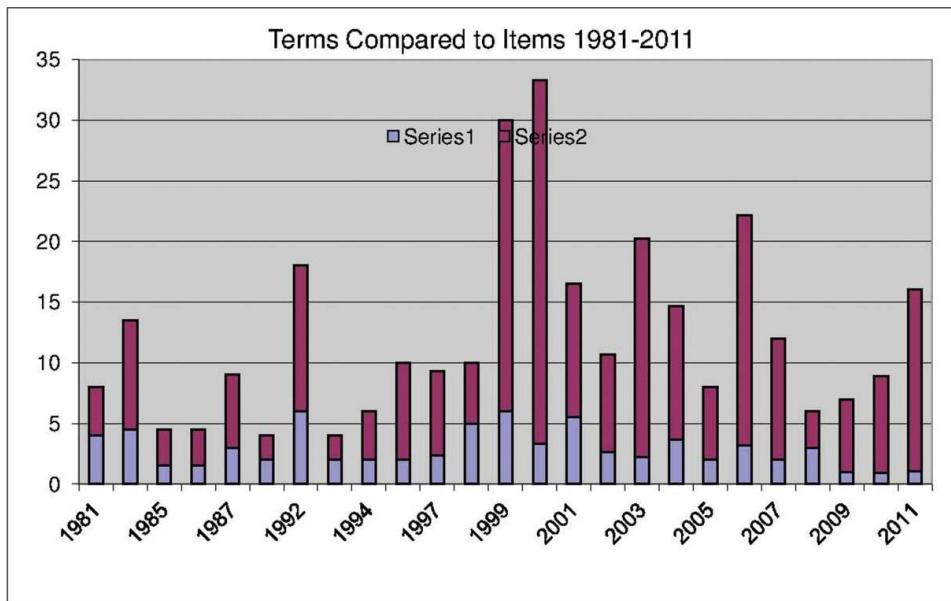


FIGURE 2 Tracked use of controlled vocabulary terms from both social work and mental health from 1981 to 2011. Series 1 shows average number of terms; Series 2 shows number of items published per year. (Color figure available online).

during that period also strongly suggests the Internet's influence with regard to a changing attitude in policing about the use of mental-health professionals and social workers. Between 1981 and 1997, less than half (44 percent) of items mentioned anything at all about these other professions, or 11 items out of 25. This percentage grew to 52 percent for the years between 1998 and 2011, when 35 articles out of 67 discussed the subject.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION FOR HYPOTHESIS II

Findings

The coding sheet for this section of the study included 15 possible outcomes of an encounter between police and EDPs:

- When EDP does not commit suicide-by-cop.
- When EDP does not commit suicide.
- When the EDP is not injured.
- When sworn personnel are not injured.
- When bystanders (family, community residents) are not injured.
- When TASERs are used.
- When other nonlethal weapons are used.
- When the EDP is arrested.

- When the EDP is escorted to a psychiatric intake facility.
- When the confrontation is deescalated.
- When the encounter is handled by patrol officers.
- When the encounter is handled by specially trained officers.
- When no litigation results from the encounter.
- When police spend less time with the patient.
- When police make fewer repeat arrests.

Of the 92 articles, 68 mentioned one or more of these potential results. According to the findings, the option most often described by the literature studied is when specially trained officers are dispatched to handle the call. This outcome was mentioned in 35 (51.4 percent) of the items. The next “better outcome” described most often was when the confrontation is deescalated. This variable was mentioned in 33 (48.5 percent) of the items. Twenty-six items (38.2 percent) mentioned the patient being escorted to a psychiatric intake facility, and 27 and 23 of the articles mentioned when neither the patient nor the officer is injured, 39.7 percent and 33.8 percent, respectively. Eighteen items (26.4 percent) mentioned no litigation resulting from the incident as a better outcome. Officers spending less time with the patient was mentioned 16 times (23.5 percent); police making fewer repeat arrests was mentioned 15 times (22 percent). Also described as a better outcome was when the EDP does not commit suicide, mentioned 16 times (23.5 percent), and when bystanders are not injured, mentioned 11 times (16 percent). When the EDP did not commit suicide-by-cop was mentioned 9 times (13.2 percent). When the encounter is handled by patrol officers was mentioned in 13 articles, or by 19 percent of the sample. The use of TASERs and use of other nonlethal weaponry as a better outcome were mentioned seven and five times, 10.2 percent and 7.3 percent, respectively. Arrest was mentioned in just two of the items. Figure 3 represents the frequency with which law-enforcement literature mentions each of 15 potential outcomes in a confrontation with an EDP.

Discussion

Both the handling of EDP calls by specially trained officers and the deescalation of the confrontation were cited as better outcomes by more than half of those items in the sample that mentioned any of the potential results. Both of these outcomes are hallmarks of the Memphis Police Department’s CIT policy. The CIT approach was mentioned specifically in 24 of 92 articles—26 percent. Despite the launch of the initiative in 1988, articles did not begin appearing with any frequency until 1996. Three appeared between 1997 and 1999. The 20 other items were all published in 2000 or later, indicating that accessibility to online information played a key role in

"Better Outcomes" for EDPs

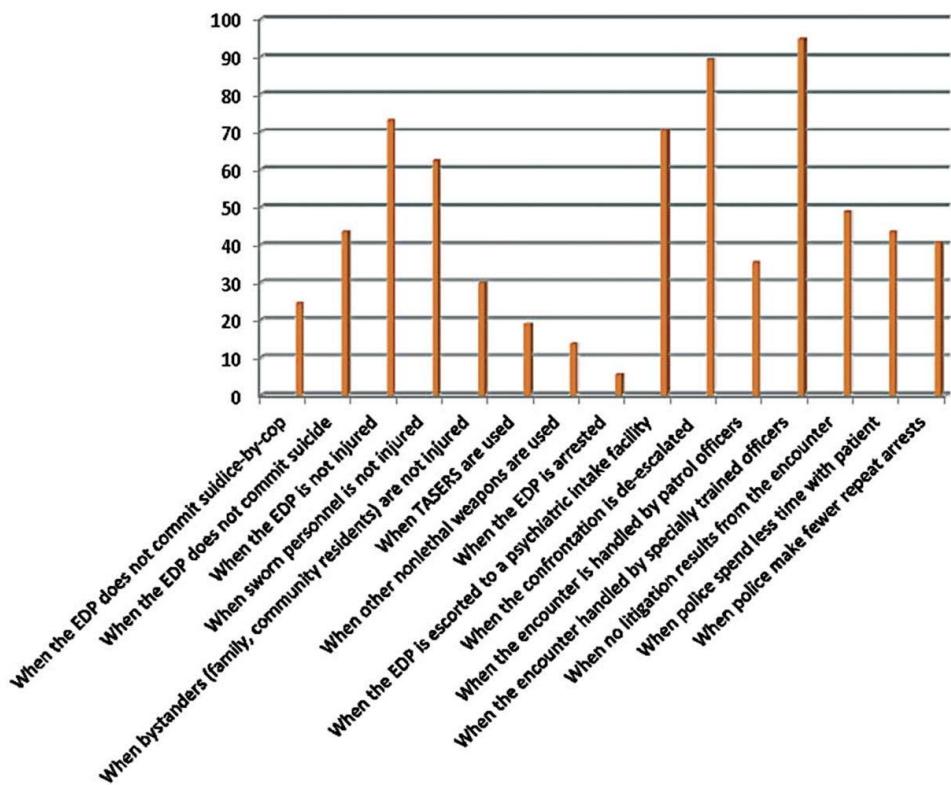


FIGURE 3 Figure represents the frequency with which law-enforcement literature mentions each of 15 potential outcomes in a confrontation with an EDP. (Color figure available online).

the adoption of this program. Indeed, many of the descriptions offered by law enforcement literature about what a better outcome for EDP encounters look like—fewer repeat arrests, shorter times with patients, fewer injuries, reduction in litigation—were all accomplished by the Memphis department. One of its key elements has been the emphasis it puts on close collaborative partnerships between law enforcement and the mental health profession.

The article “Reaching Out to the Mentally Ill” (see Appendix C: Weiss and Dresser 2000, 136) called CIT training a part of the overall community-oriented policing mission and cited the need for cooperation between the fields for the sake of the subject, saying, “It’s easier to get a crack dealer out of jail than a person with mental illness.” Zdanawicz (2001, 39) calls CIT training the best available for law enforcement, stating, “Mental healthcare providers responsible for the bottom line may be relieved to have law enforcement and corrections attending to those clients who are the most difficult to treat.” In effect, the CIT program showed the nation’s law enforcement agencies what an efficient, compassionate, and safe program for handling EDPs looks like, and how it could have better results than what departments had been achieving. It is thus reasonable to expect that the high percentage of items that listed among the potential outcomes deescalation of conflict, specially trained

officers at the scene, fast turnaround for police on EDP calls, and intake at psychiatric outpatient facilities would be key elements of a CIT program.

CONCLUSION

While the lack of research on information-seeking behavior by law enforcement makes it difficult to assess how much it has utilized scholarly online resources about mental illness, this study has found that terms from the fields of mental health and social work have been appearing in law-enforcement literature since 1981. The number of terms per year has been steady over the past 30 years, indicating that online access has had little effect on the utilization of terminology. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of articles written about EDPs since Internet use became widespread in the latter part of the 1990s.

One of the most significant police initiatives with regard to the mentally ill has been the much-duplicated CIT program. Although it was launched in 1988, news of the initiative and its success with EDPs did not become widespread until 1996, with the majority of articles in the sample written after 2000. This suggests that online access to articles on the CIT's goals of deescalating confrontations and getting EDPs admitted to psychiatric emergency rooms more quickly, as well as its emphasis on working closely with mental health professionals, significantly contributed to the adoption of these goals by police agencies across the country.

It is through the descriptions in police literature of what an improved outcome for EDPs should be that one can see most clearly the imprint of the mental health and social work fields on law enforcement. Protocols that mental health and social work professionals helped establish and execute in Memphis through the CIT were disseminated to policing agencies through trade journals. Online access to information of that type led to an abundance of articles about mental illness and a host of items on best practices for police in their often fraught encounters with EDPs.

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APPENDIX A: CHECKLIST

Checklist

Item# _____ Name of Publication _____

Type of Material _____ Year Published _____

Available online Y N

The following checklist tracks the use of controlled-vocabulary terms for both the social-work and mental-health fields by law-enforcement trade publications.

Social Work

- mental Illness
- disorders
- psychosis
- affective illness
- anorexia nervosa
- comorbidity
- depression
- emotionally disturbed
- mental health
- mental health services
- mental patients
- paranoia
- psychopathology
- community mental health
- health care utilization
- deinstitutionalization
- schizophrenia
- sociopathic personality

- psychiatric symptoms
- services
- social service utilization

Mental Health

APPENDIX B

Item# _____ Name of Publication _____

Type of Material _____ Year Published _____

Available online Y_N_

The following checklists track the descriptions given by law enforcement literature of better outcomes in police/EDP encounters.

Is the author a law-enforcement officer? Y_N_

Is the author a law-enforcement manager? Y_N_

Is the author a law-enforcement chief? Y_N_

Is the author a non-sworn contributor? Y_N_

Is the article a first-person account? Y_N_

Is the publication the journal of a law-enforcement organization? Y_N_

Is the publication an independent journal? Y_N_

Does the article concern municipal policy? Y_N_

Does the article concern county policy? Y_N_

Does the article concern federal policy? Y_N_

Does it mention Tasers? Y_N_

Does it mention other nonlethal weaponry? Y_N_

Does it favor one type over another? Y_N_

If so, what kind? _____

A better outcome, according to law enforcement literature, is when:

When EDP does not commit suicide-by-cop	—
When EDP does not commit suicide	—
When the EDP is not injured	—
When sworn personnel is not injured	—
When bystanders (family, community residents) are not injured	—
When Tasers are used	—
When other nonlethal weapons are used	—
When the EDP is arrested	—
When the EDP is escorted to a psychiatric intake facility	—
When the confrontation is de-escalated	—
When the encounter is handled by patrol officers	—
When the encounter handled by specially trained officers	—
When no litigation results from the encounter	—
When police spend less time with patient	—
When police make fewer repeat arrests	—

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES FOR THE SAMPLE USED IN THIS STUDY

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