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# Serious Mental Illness and Chronic Criminal Justice Involvement: Findings from The Massachusetts Mental Health / Criminal Justice Cohort Study

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## Why is this Issue Important?

- "Abuse of jails as mental hospitals"
- Persons with severe mental illness 1.5 times as likely to experience incarceration as to be hospitalized for treatment
- State mental health agencies involved in services for diversion and also supporting reentry of their clients



## The Massachusetts Mental Health / Criminal Justice Cohort (N = 13,816)

A statewide sample of public mental health service recipients

**Focus:** Arrests, Charges, Temporal patterns

### Inclusion Criteria:

- Receiving case management, inpatient treatment or residential services from Massachusetts Department of Mental Health between 7/1/91 and 6/30/92
- 18 years of age or older

### Tracking Arrest:

- Arrest data were obtained from the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board's "Criminal Offender Record Information" (CORI System).
- Cohort followed through December 2000 (i.e., just under 10 years)

## What is the Extent of Criminal Justice Involvement Among a SMHA's Clientele?

Cohort Characteristics & Arrest Rates		
	Pct of Cohort	Pct Arrested
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	56.2	36.1
Female	43.8	17.5
<b>Age (1991)</b>		
18-25	8.3	50.7
26-32	15.8	43.8
33-40	22.3	34.0
41-47	20.5	26.4
48-54	14.3	18.0
55+	18.8	6.7
<b>Race</b>		
"White"	82.2	26.5
"Non-White"	17.8	33.3

## Overall Cohort Offending Patterns

- 3,856 individuals were arrested at least once
- Overall 10 year prevalence of arrest for the cohort = 27.9%
- Range = 1-71
- 75% had 6 or fewer
- 17,373 total arrests (identified with CORI data)
  - Many arrests involve multiple charges or "counts"
  - 27,004 felony charges (serious crimes against persons and property, drug charges)
  - 14,850 misdemeanor charges (e.g., "nuisance crimes," low-level drug possession charges, prostitution, etc.)
  - 666 persons (4.8% of cohort, 17.2% of arrestees) were sentenced to prison or jail at least once during the observation period

## What Sort of Things Are They Arrested For?

Offense Type and Prevalence			
Offense Type	N	% of Cohort	% of Arrestees
<b>Felony Crimes Against Persons</b> Murder, Non-negligent manslaughter forcible rape, Robbery, Aggravated assault, Assault and Battery	1847	13.6%	48.6%
<b>Misdemeanor Crimes Against Persons</b> Domestic Violence (not including other charges), Violation of restraining order, simple assault, threatening, intimidation	1096	7.9%	7.9%
Assault and Battery on a Police Officer	389	2.8%	10.1%
<b>Felony Property Offenses</b> Burglary, Larceny-Theft - Shoplifting (of item over specified value), Welfare Fraud, Arson, Breaking & Entering, Receiving Stolen Property, Uttering (passing a bad check), Motor Vehicle Compulsory insurance Violation, Driving Unregistered Vehicle	1306	9.5%	9.5%
<b>Crimes Against Public Order</b> Disorderly Person, Disturbing the Peace, False Alarm, Trespassing, Possession of Alcoholic Beverage (open container) in Public Place	1744	12.6%	45.2%
<b>Drug-Related Offenses</b> Possession (Felony/misdemeanor status depends on substance and quantity), Distribution, Manufacturing, Trafficking, Conspiracy to Violate Controlled Substance Act	720	5.2%	18.7%
<b>Firearms Violations</b> Carrying a Dangerous Weapon, Discharging a Firearm in Prohibited Area, Possession of a Firearm w/o Permit or other Unlawful Possession, Bomb Hoax	169	1.2%	4.4%

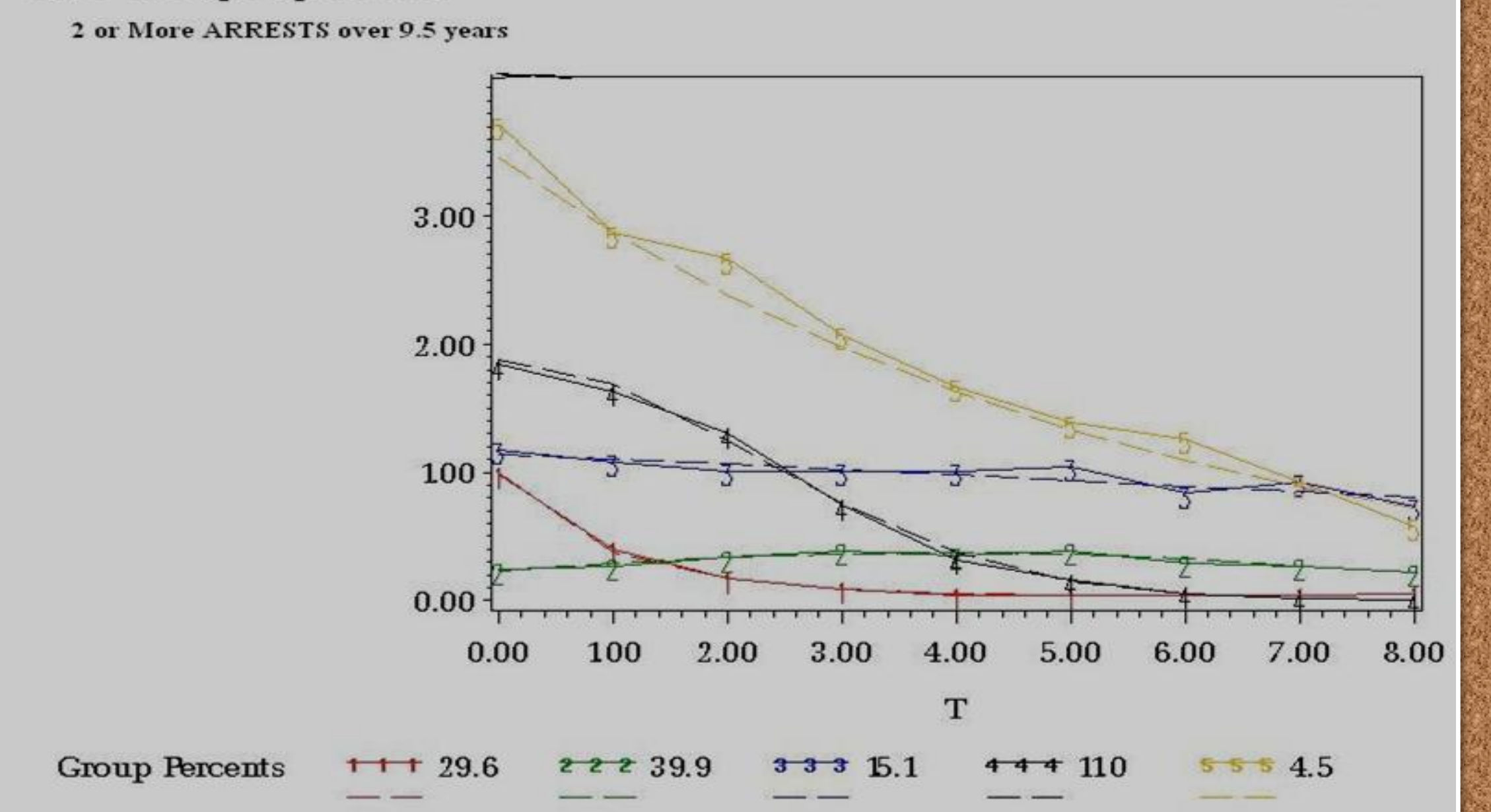
## Implications

- Data challenge the notion that the vast majority of arrestees are "nuisance offenders" who can readily be diverted
- There is considerable variation in offense types and intensity of involvement
  - Demographic risk factors are similar to what we see in the general offending population:
    - Males > Females (although less so)
    - Younger individuals at much higher risk
    - "Non-white" > "White"

## Are Arrests Unique Events or Part of a Pattern of Criminal Justice Involvement?



Number of Arrests over 9.5 years  
Five Group Zip Model



## Characterizing Trajectory-Based Groups

### Trajectory Group I (29.6%)

One charge early, drops off to average near 0

### Trajectory Group II (39.9%)

Stable across the time period; average one arrest every 2 years

### Trajectory Group III (15.1%)

Average one arrest per year through period

### Trajectory Group IV (11%)

Begins period averaging 2 per year, drops steadily over the period

### Trajectory Group V (4.5%)

Starts high (average of 5 in first year) but descends; ends period with average of 1

## Trajectory Analysis Finding: Identifying a Small But Troubling Group

A small number of cohort members ("Group V": 92 people, 4.5% of arrestees) displayed a problematic persistent arrest pattern

- Begin observation period averaging five arrests per year; end with an average of one - two
- Principal charges - drugs, "sex for hire"
- A group with serious addiction problems?
- Not clustered in any demographic group (i.e., gender, age, race / ethnicity)

## Trajectory Analysis Conclusion

This is a group that is small but makes inordinate demands on the criminal justice system. Their propensity for drug use and sex crimes raises public health and safety issues. Likely frustrate the mental health system.