

Are the Needs of Adult Offenders with Mental Health Difficulties being met in Prisons and on Probation?

Laura Cotter¹

Summary:

‘Fact: If you’ve a mental illness you’re far more likely to go to prison’
(The Prison Trap, Irish Times, 2013, p. 1).

People with mental illness are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Many policy makers and practitioners have labelled this phenomenon the ‘criminalisation of the mentally-ill’ (Ringhoff *et al.*, 2012). This article reports on a study exploring the prevalence of mental illness amongst offenders in the prison and probation populations in the Republic of Ireland. It examines the treatment of mentally ill offenders in prison and under community supervision. Recent policy and practice developments in this area are critically explored. Drawing on international literature a number of proposals are made for the development of probation policy and practice in this area.

Keywords: offenders, mental illness, mentally ill offenders, mental health difficulties, mental disorder, diversion programmes, probation, prison, criminal justice system, criminal behaviour, treatment needs, punishment of mentally ill offenders, human rights, mental illness and penal reform.