

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CRIMINAL THINKING, MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED

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## INTRODUCTION

- Previous studies have shown that criminal thinking has been strongly associated with criminal behavior (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996)
- Social determinants of Health predispose individuals to poor mental health (Comptom & Shim, 2015).
- Individuals with a mental illness are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Torrey, KennardLamb, Enslinger, & Pavle, 2010).
- The present study will explore the relationship between criminal thinking, mental illness, and social disadvantage.

## HYPOTHESES

1. Criminal thinking will predict criminal behavior.
2. Criminal thinking will be positively correlated between mental illness, homelessness and lack of employment/financial instability.
3. The correlation between criminal thinking and mental illness will be stronger when substance use is involved.

## METHODS

- The data is secondary data collected from a larger study.
- Participants were gathered using a convenience sample and quota sampling through the distribution of posters.
- Once recruited, participants completed an interview which included a self-report on 10 instruments including demographics, mental health, and criminogenic thinking.
- A correlation, t-test, and ANOVA analysis was used to test the relationship between the variables.
- **Criminogenic Cognitions Scale (CCS):** a 25-item scale that assesses a person's current way of thinking (e.i., "My crime(s) did not really harm anyone").
- **Social Disadvantage:** a 14-item self-report that assesses housing and financial problems (i.e. have you ever had trouble paying bills).
- **DSM Cross-Cutting Scale:** a 23-item scale used to measure the symptoms of mental illness (i.e. how often have you experienced little to no interest doing things).

## RESULTS

CJ Involvement	M = 42 years, R = 21-81
Gender	Male (78.4%) Female (26%)
Ethnicity	White (71.2%) Black or African American (20.8%) Other (8%)
Education	College Degree-Bachelors (54.6%)
Employment	Employed (~66.67%) Unemployed, student or retired (~33.33%)
CJ Involvement	Yes (80%) No (20%)
Been to prison	Yes (65%) No (35%)
Common Arrest	Drug related (51%) Assault (45%) DWI (31%) Probation violations (27%)

- There were no significant differences in criminal thinking across sex, education level, race or employment and criminal thinking and age were not significantly associated with one another.
- Individuals who have never been involved with the criminal justice system reported a significantly lower ( $M = 36.24$ ) criminal thinking score compared to individuals who have been involved with the criminal justice system ( $M = 40.78$ );  $F [1,117] = 8.63, p = 0.005$ .
- Looking at environment (housing) in relationship to criminal thinking, individuals who were homeless had a significantly lower criminal thinking score ( $M = 55.70$ ) compared to individuals who had shelter ( $M = 61.36$ );  $t (87) = 2.38, p = .051$
- No significant results were found between financial stability and criminal thinking.
- In relationship to MI, criminal thinking scores and DSM cross-cutting scores are slightly positively correlated. As criminal thinking scores increased DSM scores increased as well ( $r = .21, p = .052$ ).
- The study showed no significance between criminal thinking and serious mental illness. This remained true when combined with substance abuse.

## DISCUSSION

- Consistent with previous literature, this study shows that there is a positive relationship between criminal thinking and criminal justice involvement.
- Prior research suggests that the thinking among individuals with criminal justice involvement who do and do not have mental health problems are not significantly different on criminal thinking scales (Gross, 2013). In the current study, there is a trending significance in which criminal thinking is slightly positively correlated with DSM scores but showed no significant relationship to having a serious mental illness.
- The relationship between crime and mental illness may be moderated by poverty, lack of education, unemployment and limited prosocial factors (Draine, Salzer, Culhane & Hadley, 2002). Individuals who were homeless had a lower criminal thinking scores which showed a trending significance. Employment showed no significant correlation to criminal thinking.
- A major limitation of this study is that it was cross-sectional. Researchers have concluded that crime engagement decreases with age (Rocque, Michael, et al., 2015). If the variables were measured over different points in time, the results may have been different.
- Another major limitation was the sample size. It was a convenience sample and could have been larger. This may cause the study to have less reliability and some biases.
- Further research needs to be completed to determine whether or not criminal thinking is related to factors that positively correlate with criminality.

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