

# Colorado Probation Research in Brief

## *Unraveling the Complexity of Driving While Intoxicated*

Freeman, J., Maxwell, J. C., & Davey, J. (2011). Unraveling the Complexity of Driving While Intoxicated: a Study into the Prevalence of Psychiatric and Substance Abuse Comorbidity. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 43(1), 34-39.

**Key Words:** DUI, DUI treatment, drug use, substance abuse, co-occurring, assessment, treatment, mental health

### **DUI and Co-Occurring Disorders**

#### **Summary/Conclusions**

Using a very large sample of treatment clients in Texas, researchers studied the characteristics and outcomes of two groups: one group was composed of substance abuse treatment clients who had a DUI offense in the past year, and the other group was composed of substance abuse treatment clients who were in treatment but had not had a DUI treatment in the past year. Specifically the study's focus was to examine the extent of co-occurring disorders in the DUI offending population. For DUI offenders, depression was the most frequent diagnosis.

#### **Limitations of Information**

The only individuals included in the analysis were those that met low income eligibility criteria, and the treatment programs were those that served these populations and received state funding. The results may vary with more affluent populations and privately funded providers. Also, psychiatric diagnostic data was not available on 33% of the subjects. Although, the study compared non-DUI to DUI treatment participants; 52% of the non-DUI clients were mandated and 91% on DUI were involuntary.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

In order to study the frequency of co-occurring disorders in DUI offenders seeking treatment, researchers queried Texas records of all substance abuse treatment programs that received funding from the State Health Services. The sample included all admissions between 2005 and 2008, totaling 36,373 clients enrolled as the result of a DUI offense within the past year, and 308,714 clients enrolled for substance abuse treatment, who did not have a DUI in the past year (non-DUI clients). Psychiatric Diagnoses were determined by trained personnel using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM IV) and were included in 67% of the records.

Results of the analysis first compared the characteristics of the two populations. The "DUI clients were more likely to have a primary problem with alcohol, to be older, to be first admissions to treatment, and to have worked more months in the past year," as compared to these same variables with the non-DUI clients. The DUI clients were also less likely to complete treatment.

Researchers found important results specific to DUI clients: they were more likely to also abuse marijuana, depression was the most common psychiatric condition, and 4.2% of the DUI clientele were diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. The "mood disorder rates (e.g. Major Depressive Episode & Bipolar Disorder) are higher than the average population rate." It was noted that these mood disorders can impact the client's ability to successfully complete treatment. Under-

diagnosing psychiatric disorders was noted as a "significant concern for the DUI treatment provider." The sooner these co-occurring issues can be identified and treated, the better the chances of a positive outcome. Consequently, the researchers suggested that DUI clients be screened for mental health issues "at first contact with the judicial system" to provide the best opportunity to succeed in treatment and reduce recidivism.

#### **Practical Applications**

- ✓ Use the Colorado Criminal Justice Mental Health Screen at the time of the alcohol evaluation or presentence investigation interview to identify the need for further evaluation of co-occurring issues.
- ✓ When co-occurring disorders exist, utilize treatment agencies that can provide the necessary services, in concert with the DUI requirements.
- ✓ Incorporate the treatment of co-occurring disorders in the probation case plan to reinforce the importance of psychotropic medications, counseling, and abstinence.
- ✓ Access offender treatment funds to ensure immediate assessment and treatment of co-occurring disorders.
- ✓ When supervising DUI offenders, remember to focus on criminal risk and criminogenic need, rather than the offense.
- ✓ Secure a baseline urine sample and test intermittently to ensure other substance abuse is not occurring during supervision.

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