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Experiences of urban and suburban police officers encountering mental illness in their communities : training, attitudes and actions

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Sophie Ricks
Experiences of Urban and
Suburban Police
Officers Encountering Mental
Illness in Their Communities:
Training, Attitudes
And Actions

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to explore the experiences of urban and suburban police officers who encounter persons with mental illness in their communities. The focus was on the issues of training, attitudes, and action when responding to calls involving the mentally ill. Specifically, this project targeted the experiences of police officers with at least one year on the force. Police officers came from two police departments in two different neighborhoods.

Interviews were completed with 12 police officers of different backgrounds. Officers answered twenty-one Likert scale type questions addressing their experiences with the mentally ill and mental health agencies, in addition to three open-ended questions about challenges they face, changes they believe would improve outcomes for the mentally ill and incidents they'd faced with PwMI.

The findings of the study showed that participants were able identify a broad range of obstacles to their work with PwMI and offer many useful suggestions for how to improve collaboration with local mental health professionals. Of further significance, while officers expressed frustration with the situations involving PwMI, their attitudes and beliefs about the mentally ill in general were quite positive.

EXPERIENCES OF URBAN AND SUBURBAN
POLICE OFFICERS
ENCOUNTERING MENTAL ILLNESS
IN THEIR COMMUNITIES:
TRAINING, ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

A project based upon an independent investigation,
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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Smith College School for Social Work

2009

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