

Mental Health Rehabilitation and Responding to People with Mental Illness in the Context of Criminal Courts in Remote, Mainly Inuit Arctic Communities

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Criminal court mental health initiatives to reduce the number of people with mental illness in the criminal justice system do not exist in the Canadian Arctic territory of Nunavut despite their proliferation internationally. These initiatives belong to a family of “problem-solving” courts that address the root cause of criminal behavior. Researchers have recently suggested using the problem-solving court principles that guide criminal court mental health diversion initiatives to deliver their rehabilitative objectives outside of well-resourced, specialized urban courts. But while the problem-solving court principles include the need for an effective “rehabilitative response,” a contemporary understanding of this response from mental health rehabilitation research—including current thinking about the role of culture in mental health recovery—is not well-explored. This study examined the potential for delivering the objectives of criminal court mental health diversion in Nunavut using problem-solving court principles. A qualitative multiple-case study involving 55 semi-structured interviews and focus groups was used to gather and analyze the experiences of justice and health professionals, representatives of community organizations and other community members in three communities. The study showed that the confounding effects of Inuit culture comprised a dominant issue in conversations about the three most-discussed objectives of problem-solving principles: identifying mental illness, approaches to treatment and multidisciplinary collaboration. Themes revealed in conversations about culture showed a clear resonance with culturally responsive concepts from mental health research known as “protective factors” in the mental health of Inuit and other indigenous people. This result suggests a consideration of protective factors may be essential for problem-solving court thinking for people with mental illness in the context of mainly Inuit Arctic communities.

References

Ferrazzi, Priscilla. “Therapeutic Jurisprudence, Rehabilitation, and Responding to Mental Illness in the Context of Criminal Courts In Remote, Mainly Inuit Arctic Communities.” PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2015.