

Overview of **Forensic Mental Health** Practitioners

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The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of forensic mental health services for the criminal justice practitioner who may not be fully familiar with the roles and responsibilities of mental health practitioners within the criminal justice system as well as the resources they provide. Given the influential role of mental health in the rehabilitation process, specifically as it pertains to the process of reentry for incarcerated individuals, mental health practitioners can serve as a valuable resource to those within criminal justice populations as well as other professionals within relatable fields.

Providing quality mental health care for individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system is complex and multifaceted in nature. Types of quality care consist of several varying, yet essential components. A major player involved in the criminal justice system is the forensic mental health practitioner (FMHP). The FMHP provides support and services to those who have been involved in criminal justice and legal systems by way of incarceration, civil commitment, probation, or involvement with a problem-solving court.

Responding professionals such as police officers, emergency dispatch professionals, security officers, firefighters, paramedics, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) may interact with FMHP professionals. Other professionals who may interact with an FMHP include correctional-based professionals (e.g., corrections, parole, and probation officers), prosecuting and defense attorneys, and judges. Thus, these responding professionals would significantly benefit from expanding their knowledge, awareness and training in topics related to forensic mental health. Moreover, FMHPs may also work with individuals reentering communities from a correctional setting or probationary status and provide support services to assist individuals throughout their process of reintegration back into society. Upon completing incarceration and being confronted with reentering the community, incarcerated individuals often face significant challenges and roadblocks (e.g., access to employment, support network, and housing).

A primary function of the FMHP is to assist the recipient with the creation of a personalized plan to help guide the individual toward developing the skills required to reach specific objectives and goals pertaining to interpersonal relationships, adaptive functioning and activities of daily living, and career development, to name a few. An FMHP can also assist patients with locating appropriate resources, teach the individual skills to reduce mental health related symptoms, and provide needed support during times of stress. Additionally, an FMHP may be part of an integrated clinical and rehabilitative treatment team that serves to provide a holistic approach to treatment, which can be particularly beneficial for individuals who have a dual diagnosis of mental illness in combination with substance abuse problems. The FMHP also forms partnerships with community resources in housing, employment, education, and other supportive functions in an effort to facilitate success for individuals reintegrating from correctional settings.

FMHPs typically hold a B.A., B.S., M.A., or M.S. degree in a social science area (e.g., counseling, criminal justice, criminology, social work, sociology, psychology, or social work). More often than not, an FMHP is an unlicensed professional who has some training and experience working with criminal justice involved clients. FMHPs commonly find employment in outpatient treatment settings or case management.

Biographies

Jerrod Brown, M.A., M.S., M.S., M.S., is the treatment director for Pathways Counseling Center, Inc. Pathways provides programs and services benefiting individuals impacted by mental illness and addictions. Jerrod is also the founder and CEO of the American Institute for the Advancement of Forensic Studies (AIAFS) and the lead developer and program director of an online graduate degree program in Forensic Mental Health from Concordia University, St. Paul, Minnesota

Mario L. Hesse, Ph.D., is a professor of criminal justice at St. Cloud State University. Dr. Hesse's areas of research and teaching focus on corrections, delinquency, gangs, and media and crime. He is a board member of the Midwest Alliance on Shaken Baby Syndrome (MASBS). Mario has been a review editor for *A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society*, the *Journal of Gang Research*, and other journal and periodical publications.

Samantha R. Lee, M.S., is a doctoral candidate and instructor of psychology at Texas Woman's University. Her research has largely focused on spirituality, addictions, and trauma, most notably as it pertains to sex trafficking.

Janina Wresh has 19 years of experience in the law enforcement capacity, including, but not limited to, forensic crime laboratory, 4th Judicial Courts and Adult Detention Center affiliation, deputy sheriff and police officer, crime scene technician, domestic abuse response and crisis intervention specialist, AIAFS COO, adjunct criminal justice professor and lecturer, and board member of the Midwest Alliance on Shaken Baby Syndrome (MASBS).