

What Ohioans Think About...

Treatment versus Prison for People with Severe Mental Illnesses who Get in Trouble with the Law

Results from The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati's Ohio Health Issues Poll 2006



For many people with severe mental illnesses who get in trouble with the law, community-based treatment is more effective than prison for addressing individual needs and preventing repeat run-ins with the law. According to the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health's *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America* (2003), community-based treatment can also be more cost-effective than prison for certain people with severe mental illnesses who get in trouble with the law.



The 2006 *Ohio Health Issues Poll* asked Ohioans if they would favor or oppose replacing prison sentences with mandatory mental illness treatment programs for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of non-violent crimes, given that the treatment program would cost the same amount as sending the person to prison.

Severe mental illnesses were described to survey participants in this way:

Severe mental illnesses are serious chronic illnesses that affect the brain. People with these illnesses may hear voices, have hallucinations or serious delusions, experience profound depression or paralyzing anxiety, or have uncontrollable mood swings. These disorders can profoundly disrupt a person's thinking, ability to relate to others, and ability to cope with the demands of life. When the illness is active, a person may lose touch with reality or may not be able to process information normally.

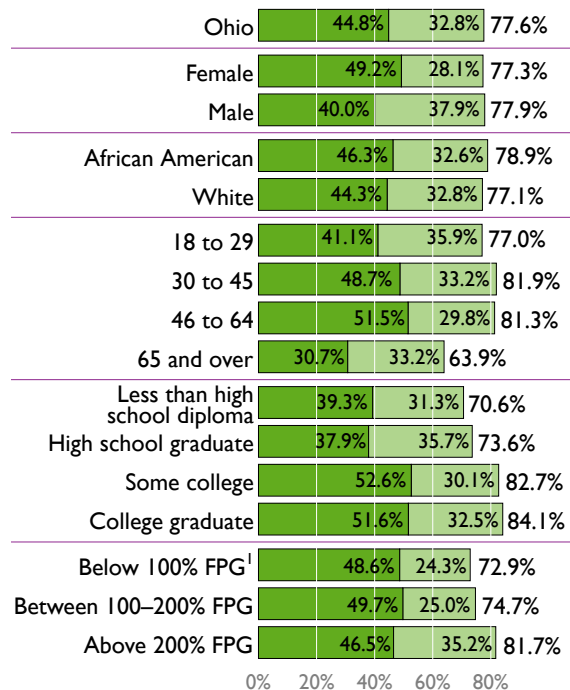
Mental health treatment versus prison for people with severe mental illnesses convicted of non-violent crimes

About three-quarters of Ohioans (77.6%) favor replacing prison sentences with mandatory mental illness treatment programs for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of non-violent crimes. There were no differences between sexes or between African Americans and whites.

As education level or family income increased, the likelihood that Ohioans favor treatment

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% of Ohioans reporting that they **strongly favor** or **favor somewhat** replacing prison sentences with mandatory mental illness treatment programs for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of a non-violent crime.



¹ The federal poverty guideline (FPG) in 2005 was an annual income of \$19,350 for a family of 4.



These findings are from The Health Foundation of Greater Cincinnati's Ohio Health Issues Poll, part of the Ohio Poll conducted May 9–21, 2006, by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Cincinnati. A random sample of 841 adults from throughout Ohio was interviewed by telephone. In 95 of 100 cases, the statewide estimates will be accurate to $\pm 3.4\%$. In addition to sampling error, there are other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects that can introduce error or bias. For more information about the Ohio Health Issues Poll, please visit www.healthfoundation.org/ohip.html.

versus prison also increased. As age increased, the likelihood that Ohioans favor treatment versus prison also increased, until age 65. About 6 in 10 Ohioans ages 65 and over (63.9%) favored treatment over prison for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of non-violent crimes, compared to 8 in 10 Ohioans younger than age 65 (80.4%).

Mental health treatment versus prison for people with severe mental illnesses who have no prior criminal record and who are convicted of non-violent crimes

The *Ohio Health Issues Poll* also asked Ohioans specifically about treatment instead of prison for people with severe mental illnesses who are convicted of a non-violent crime and *have no prior criminal record*.

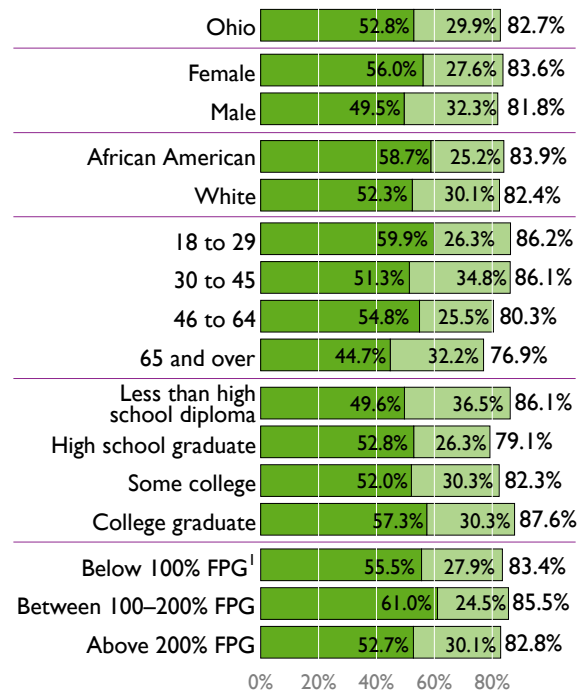
Slightly more Ohioans favored treatment over prison for people with severe mental illnesses *who have no prior criminal record* and who are convicted of non-violent crimes. Again, there were no differences between the sexes or between African Americans and whites. There were also no differences for this question among family income groups.

Although the likelihood that Ohioans favored treatment over prison in this case decreased as age increased, differences were not significant. For a first offense, Ohioans age 65 and over were more likely to favor treatment over prison than they were for offenders in general.

There were some differences among education levels. With the exception of Ohioans with less than a high

school education, as education level increased, the likelihood that Ohioans favored treatment over prison for people with severe mental illnesses *who have no prior criminal record* and who are convicted of non-violent crimes also increased. Ohioans with less than a high school education were about as likely as Ohioans who graduated from college to favor treatment over prison in this case.

% of Ohioans reporting that they **strongly favor** or **favor somewhat** replacing prison sentences with mandatory mental illness treatment programs for people with severe mental illnesses who have no prior criminal record and are convicted of a non-violent crime.



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