

Probation – Summary of the Council of Europe Survey

There was good response to the survey (66%) boosted by the returns of 11/16 German states. Half the proportion of probation staff received mental health awareness training compared to prison staff (74% vs 37%). Estimates of the prevalence of mental health problems in probation varied from 2% (Slovakia) to 90% (Scotland) with a median of 15%. However only four jurisdictions collected prevalence data routinely. Robust research has indicated that the figure is closer to 40% so largely probation services seriously under-estimated the prevalence.

By far the most common model for probation clients to access mental healthcare was through the use of external healthcare agencies (86%), 10% accessed services in the voluntary sector. Screening for mental health disorders was most likely to take place in the court (94%) or in prison (86%). Psychiatrists (61%) and psychologists (61%) were mostly involved although GPs were involved in nearly one-third of cases (30%)

Most probation responses indicated that the role of probation services was to direct probationers to external services (as above). It should be noted that two countries, Malta and Northern Ireland, used an 'in-house' treatment service run by psychologists. England had a one-off initiative for offenders with a personality disorder. In one service, Baden-Wurttemberg in Germany, some probation staff were trained to be mental health specialists.

12 (32%) countries/jurisdictions had specific treatment orders for mental health. In England, there had been concerted efforts to maximise the use of mental health treatment requirements in the CSTR project. 5 (14%) of countries/jurisdictions monitor suicide rates in probation (Bulgaria, N Ireland, France and Ireland) but provide no data. England provides a website address showing that probation suicides have been examined for a number of years.

A small number of probation services work with families (14%) and 27% provide a gender approach to probation which was often trauma-informed.