

Lettie Prell  
Director of Research

Curt Smith  
Executive Assistant to the Director



## Data Download



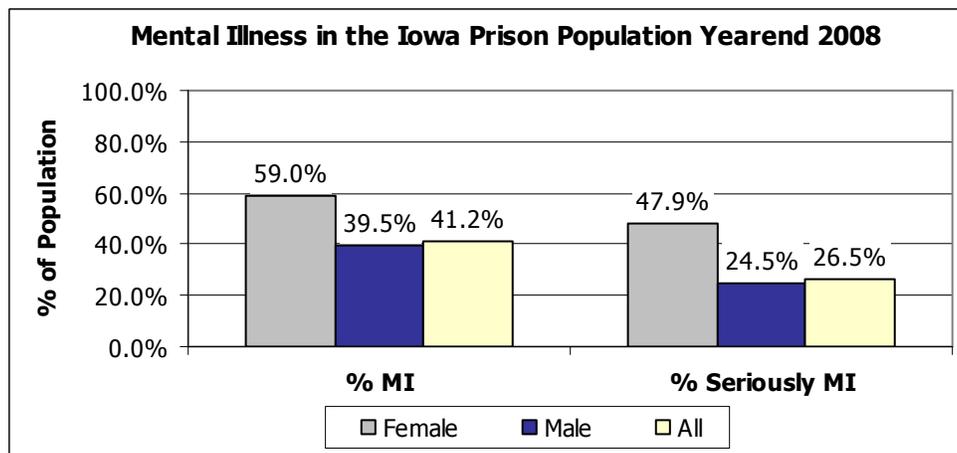
### Seriousness/Acuity of Mentally Ill Offenders in Prison

As of yearend 2008, about 41.2% of inmates had at least one diagnosis of a mental illness. The prevalence of mental illness among female offenders is higher than for men. However, it is important to look beyond these numbers to obtain a more accurate picture of the mentally ill inmate population and the challenges they pose for the Department of Corrections.

Some diagnoses are defined as serious, persistent conditions:

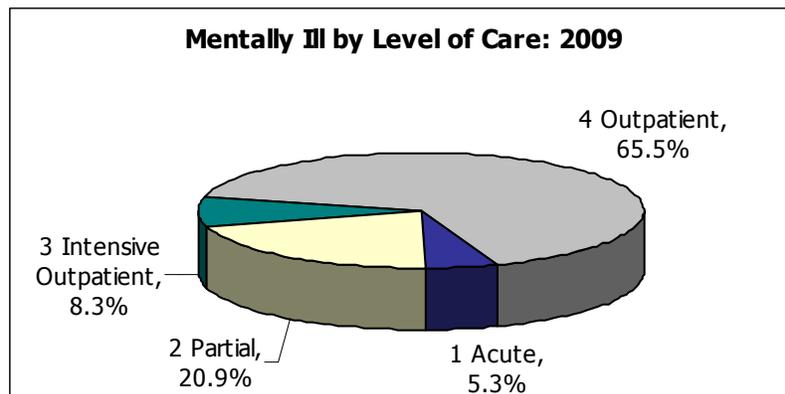
- bipolar disorders;
- dementia/organic disorders;
- depression/major depressive disorders;
- psychosis/psychotic disorders; and
- schizophrenia.

Using this definition, about 26.5% of the prison population is seriously mentally ill. Again, the rate for female offenders is higher, at nearly 48%.



Even seriously mentally ill offenders can often be successfully treated and managed while residing with the general population. Various factors such as placements in suicide/self-injury protocol, mental health observations, and number of times seen by a psychiatrist have been used to estimate the populations of mentally ill offenders needing each level of care within the mental health care continuum.

The chart below breaks down the level of acuity into four levels. “Partial” refers to those offenders who can function in the general population except during periodic episodes when symptoms become acute, which would then require a separate housing/security environment.



The good news is that through proper diagnosis, treatment and medication monitoring, most mentally ill offenders can be appropriately managed in the general population. However, the roughly 26 percent of mentally ill inmates with an acute or partially acute mental health diagnosis require an inordinate amount of treatment and security resources. From March 1, 2009 through July 31, 2009, there were 753 critical incident reports (e.g. acts of violence, suicide attempts, illnesses and injuries) at the nine correctional institutions in the state. Almost 76% of them (571) involved mentally ill offenders.