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**Title of presentation:** An Exploration of Justice Personnel's Perceptions of and Experiences with Mentally Ill Offenders

### **Abstract**

Deinstitutionalization and increased criminalization of mentally ill offenders result in their overrepresentation within the criminal justice system. Justice personnel now encounter mentally ill offenders more frequently. Yet, their workplace experiences with and perceptions of mentally ill offenders are largely misunderstood. Six semi-structured interviews with justice personnel from Western Canada were conducted. Inductive coding generated three preliminary themes. "It's all about funding," centers on staff shortages, inadequate prison services, fragmented community supports, and a lack of affordable housing. "If it bleeds, it leads" identifies negative media framing that contributes to mental illness stigma and police demonization, which increases public fear and disdain of mentally ill offenders more broadly. Finally, "They're just people," suggests the perceptions and experiences of justice personnel are predominantly positive. These findings shed light on the lived realities of justice personnel and are an integral first step to informing policy, improving service delivery, and identifying programming needs.