

Study examines how arrests in the homeless population impact long term attitudes toward police

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Yasmeen Krameddine and Dr. Peter Silverstone Credit: Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Alberta

(Edmonton) A new study from the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry is giving important new insight into how officer interactions with the homeless can shape their long-term attitudes toward

police.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, examined police interactions with the homeless in the city of Edmonton. Approximately 10 percent of the total homeless population, 214 individuals, was interviewed. Of those, 47 per cent of those indicated they had interacted with a police officer within the past month. It was found that homeless people who had been arrested or handcuffed and did not feel respected by the arresting officer during the interaction retained long-term negative attitudes toward police that continued for at least two years.

"This really has many implications for police services and those who interact with people in distressed situations," says Peter Silverstone, a professor in the Faculty's Department of Psychiatry and senior author on the paper. "If they don't feel respected, they are much less likely to collaborate with the police. On the other hand, if they view you as being empathetic, as being there to help them, and that you're doing your job for both their safety and yours, they will be prepared to help you in the future."

It's believed there are as many as 15,000 homeless individuals on any given day in Canada. According to Silverstone, it's estimated at least 60 percent suffer from mental illness and/or addiction issues. He believes teaching empathic listening, communication skills and de-escalation techniques to police and others who interact with the homeless is critical to their everyday success.

"These are wide ranging skills that are currently not being taught to any of these groups and can dramatically improve the calibre and quality of the interactions," says Silverstone. "Furthermore, this group of individuals is subject to much higher crime rates, so it's very much in the police's best interest to get as much information as they can from them.

A way of obtaining that information is by showing respect."

"There is strong evidence showing training can address these issues," adds Yasmeen Krameddine, lead author of the study and a post-doctoral fellow in the Department of Psychiatry. "Even if an interaction ends up with a [homeless](#) individual being handcuffed or arrested, if it's done in a respectful manner there can still be very positive outcomes."

Silverstone and Krameddine believe police should be made aware of the potential long-term negative consequences of routinely handcuffing during an arrest, and that they receive specific training to reduce its frequency. They also believe there should be significantly more study on the psychological impacts of handcuffing on a range of populations—which may show ways to improve [police](#) policies moving forward.

"It's very apparent that mutual respect, particularly from those who are in positions of authority or power, is really important to successful longer term outcomes," says Silverstone. "Both for the individuals and for society as a whole."

Provided by University of Alberta Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry

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