

Study sheds light on how the justice system can affect physical, mental health

September 9 2019, by Matt Shipman



Credit: Bill Oxford

New research from North Carolina State University finds that being convicted of a crime is associated with a decline in one's physical health, even if the conviction doesn't lead to jail time. The study also confirms previous work finding that being arrested is associated with adverse mental health outcomes, even if an individual isn't ultimately charged with a crime.

"Many people often think of low-level interactions with the [justice system](#) as being inconsequential," says April Fernandes, author of a paper on the work and an assistant professor of sociology at NC State. "For example, if someone is arrested and released, it's seen as 'no harm, no foul.'"

"We're learning that there can be significant mental [health](#) effects from low-level contacts. And there can be significant physical health effects even when convictions are associated with probation or fines, rather than jail time."

For this study, Fernandes looked at data from a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 young people who participated in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, focusing specifically on data submitted between 1999 and 2010. The study participants were between the ages of 18 and 32.

Specifically, Fernandes evaluated self-reported physical and mental health assessments to determine whether there was a change in reported [health status](#) associated with justice system contact. Fernandes looked at four types of contact for study participants: being arrested; being charged; being convicted; and being sentenced to jail time.

"People reported increases in depression and stress across the continuum of contact, from arrest to jail time," Fernandes says. "That's consistent with previous work."

"And we knew that [jail](#) time affects physical health, for a host of reasons. But the fact that convictions were associated with [physical health](#) effects is particularly interesting. It would be worth exploring what drives those outcomes in greater detail."

The paper, "How Far Up the River? Criminal Justice Contact and Health

Outcomes," is published in the journal *Social Currents*.

More information: April D. Fernandes. How Far Up the River? Criminal Justice Contact and Health Outcomes, *Social Currents* (2019). DOI: [10.1177/2329496519870216](https://doi.org/10.1177/2329496519870216)

Provided by North Carolina State University

Citation: Study sheds light on how the justice system can affect physical, mental health (2019, September 9) retrieved 12 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-09-justice-affect-physical-mental-health.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.