

# Study reveals impact of evictions on people with mental health disorders

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Dr. Sujata Shetty, professor in the UToledo Department of Geography and Planning and director of the Jack Ford Urban Affairs Center, found that evictions are a problem in Toledo and that those who use mental health services are disproportionately affected. Credit: University of Toledo

All renters facing eviction deal with anxiety and stress at the prospect of

losing the roof over their heads.

A new study conducted by the Jack Ford Urban Affairs Center at The University of Toledo shows evictions have a unique and powerful impact on people with mental [health](#) disorders and that often the cause for [eviction](#) is related to the [mental health disorder](#).

Dr. Sujata Shetty, professor in the UToledo Department of Geography and Planning and director of the Jack Ford Urban Affairs Center, and George Thomas, vice president and general counsel for The Fair Housing Center and former senior attorney at Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, found that evictions are a big problem in Toledo and disproportionately affect people who use mental health services.

More than 23,000 total evictions were filed over a four-year period in Toledo, a "very high" eviction rate per capita for the general public, researchers said, when compared to national-level data from 2014 to 2018.

The researchers reviewed documents from a random sample of more than 300 court cases and found that in a third of the cases the landlord did not meet the legal criteria for eviction—meaning the tenants could have stayed longer but were evicted because they didn't know the law or didn't have a lawyer to help them.

Although mental health data is not recorded in the court filings, researchers say the landlords who file the most evictions in Toledo are federally subsidized affordable [housing](#) providers—the very same housing providers that mental health consumers rely on.

"Many are at the mercy of landlords," Shetty said. "Because mental health consumers often must rely on these housing providers and are more likely to face eviction, the crisis takes a huge toll on them."

The researchers revealed geographic patterns in the census block group concentrations of persons receiving mental healthcare and the distribution of eviction filings.

Using data from Mental Health and Recovery Services of Lucas County, researchers mapped the areas in the city with the largest concentration of mental health cases, finding they mostly live in neighborhoods with higher poverty rates and have higher rates of female-headed households, higher percentages of median income spent on rent, lower unemployment rates and are a majority Black. Individuals who receive mental health services from private providers are not included in this study.

"For mental health consumers, stable housing is necessary to follow treatment plans, which results in better outcomes and lowers the stigma of mental illness," Thomas said. "The impact of eviction on the mental health of this population is great. Emotional distress can be extremely severe. Disruption in their housing arrangements makes them feel vulnerable and isolated."

To zero in on a more nuanced view of the housing challenges faced by people who use mental health services, researchers conducted and analyzed interviews with providers and clients of mental health services.

Behavioral issues as a result of missed medications and COVID-related challenges have put this population at higher risk for eviction.

When discussing the tension between landlords and tenants with mental health disorders, one interview cited conflicts with neighbors, misinterpretation of mental health episodes, cleanliness and slow enforcement of judge-ordered repairs as some of the sources.

The study found there is a shortage of affordable housing available for

this population, the quality of available units is poor, and potential tenants' mental health-related evictions history leave them with even fewer options.

Interviews also recall several situations of suicide, psychotic breaks and other extreme behavior from clients as a result of evictions.

"Fortunately, the moratorium placed on evictions as a response to the pandemic has reduced the scramble, but once that is lifted the system may experience a wave of evictions," Shetty said. "The fear of being kicked out lingers and troubles these individuals."

The pandemic has exacerbated the country's housing crisis. A study by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia showed that tenants who lost jobs during the COVID-19 crisis had amassed \$11 billion in missed rent.

Toledo's mental health network can serve as a sustainable and reliable resource, but the COVID-19 pandemic added extra hurdles for both clients and providers.

Area [mental health](#) agencies are struggling to keep up with the demand for their services, which has skyrocketed in 2020 and 2021.

One provider told the researchers, "My case managers pre-COVID, their caseloads were 15-to-25 clients per person. Their caseloads right now are about 30-to-45 clients per person."

Area agencies, including The Fair Housing Center and Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, plan to use the report to put together policy recommendations on housing for consumers of [mental health services](#) in Toledo.

Provided by University of Toledo

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