

Research reveals many laws targeting homelessness are ineffective

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A University of Texas at Arlington professor recently published a study

that found no correlation between laws criminalizing homeless activities and a long-term reduction of homelessness.

Hannah Lebovits, an assistant professor in the Department of Public Affairs and Planning, surveyed the 100 most populous cities around the country with high rates of homelessness and laws aimed at reducing it. She found that such policies deter homelessness for only a short period before rising again.

"It's a common myth that to reduce homelessness, we need to be tougher on this population," Dr. Lebovits said. "It comes from this idea of deterrence, which is making an action a [criminal activity](#)—in theory, that would keep people from engaging in it."

Lebovits looked at many laws targeting specific activities frequently associated with homelessness, such as encampments and public intoxication and urination, and at data on homelessness from between 2000 and 2020. She found that there was never a substantial decrease in the [homeless population](#). Laws targeting homeless activity sometimes demonstrated short-term reductions, but no long-term ones.

Lebovits said research shows that to have long-term success in reducing homelessness, addressing the root causes of homelessness and their contributing factors are more effective.

"There's a ton of work that we need to do at the community level," she said. "People don't just wake up and decide to be homeless; there's a lot of cracks they've fallen through."

The study is [available](#) as a working paper in the *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

More information: Hannah Lebovits et al, Do Criminalization Policies Impact Local Homelessness? Exploring the Limits and Concerns

of Socially Constructed Deviancy, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2024). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.4716230](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4716230)

Provided by University of Texas at Arlington

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