

Suicide risk rises after criminal encounters: study

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People who have had run-ins with the law, even if they were never jailed, show a higher risk of committing suicide, said a study released Monday.

The research, published in the [Archives of General Psychiatry](#), a journal of the American Medical Association, examined records in Denmark and found that the risk of [suicide](#) was highest among people who did time behind bars.

But the study authors also determined that suicide risk was "elevated even among those who had never received prison time or a guilty verdict," when compared to people who had never been exposed to the [criminal justice system](#).

"Suicide was most strongly associated with sentencing to [psychiatric treatment](#) and with charges conditionally withdrawn," or suspended sentences, the study said.

British researchers examined the records of 27,219 people in Denmark who died from suicide between 1981 and 2006 and compared them to a control group of 524,899 people who were alive but otherwise matched them by age and sex.

Then, they linked those records to data from a national registry of criminals to determine which individuals were exposed to the justice system after 1980.

More than a third (34.8 percent) of the men who died by killing themselves had a history with the criminal justice system, compared to almost one-quarter (24.6 percent) in the control group.

Among women, 12.8 percent of those who died by suicide had criminal encounters, compared to 5.1 percent of the control group.

"The risk of suicide was especially high among those with a criminal history who were younger, who had been charged for violent offenses and whose contact with the criminal justice system was recent or repeated," it said.

The study said that because suicide risk appeared to mount in relation to the number of times a person had contact with the criminal justice system, and how recent those encounters were, they believe that the research was not simply reflecting trends among people who were more likely to be troublemakers.

"Exposure to the criminal justice system in itself may contribute to elevating a person's [suicide risk](#), rather than simply reflecting the traits and characteristics of people who come into contact with the system," it said.

The study was led by Roger Webb of the University of Manchester.

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