

# Study examines link between incarceration and psychiatric disorders

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Psychiatric disorders are prevalent among current and former inmates of correctional institutions, but what has been less clear is whether incarceration causes these disorders or, alternatively, whether inmates have these problems before they enter prison. A study co-authored by Jason Schnittker, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, shows that many of the most common psychiatric disorders found among former inmates, including impulse control disorders, emerge in childhood and adolescence and, therefore, predate incarceration. Yet, incarceration seems to lead to some mood related psychiatric disorders, such as major depression, which have important implications for what happens to inmates after their release.

Michael Massoglia, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Christopher Uggen, a professor of sociology at the University of Minnesota, co-authored the study, "Out and Down: Incarceration and Psychiatric Disorders," which appears in the current issue of the [Journal of Health and Social Behavior](#).

Using data from the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, which took place between 2001 and 2003, the researchers examined the relationship between incarceration and psychiatric disorders after statistically adjusting for influences that might affect both, including an impoverished childhood background.

Their results reveal robust and long-lasting relationships between incarceration and [psychiatric conditions](#) that adversely affect one's

mood, such as [major depression](#).

"These conditions, in turn, are strongly related to other impairments, including a diminished capacity to form [social relationships](#) and to focus on daily activities including work," said Schnittker. "Although often neglected as a consequence of incarceration, mood related conditions might explain some of the difficulties former inmates experience following release."

In the study's conclusion, the researchers suggest that mental health treatment could help former inmates reintegrate into society and they encourage efforts to facilitate this. "Even though many former [inmates](#) want to get back on their feet after release, they experience numerous difficulties in doing so, some legal, some social, and some personal," Schnittker said. "Being depressed probably makes all of these obstacles even more difficult to overcome. Reentry requires motivation, and depression can rob you of that."

Schnittker's research interests are in medical sociology, focusing on mental health, physical health, and the relationship between the two. His current research on the effects of incarceration on the health of individuals, families, and communities is funded in part by a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Investigator Award in Health Policy.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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