

# Studies highlight impact of addiction, housing on crime

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A Simon Fraser University-led study of more than 31,000 B.C. offenders has found that offenders with mental disorders are not as strongly associated with repeating crime as may be commonly thought. Meanwhile the odds of recidivism are significantly higher among those with substance use or co-occurring disorders.

The study, published this week in the American Psychological Association's (APA) journal [Psychology, Public Policy and Law](#), suggests that addiction is the main driver of reconviction among the so-called psychological or [psychiatric disorders](#).

The researchers say better treatment for [substance use](#) problems, a greater focus on specific types of mental disorders, and a debunking of the stigma regarding people experiencing mental illness are needed.

"This adds strength to the emerging conclusion that non-substance-related [mental disorders](#) are, as a group, less likely to predict recidivism than substance use disorders," says SFU PhD student Stefanie Rezansoff, who led the research team.

Rezansoff, an SFU dean's convocation medalist, has a doctoral research fellowship from the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and a fellowship from Intersections of Mental Health Perspectives in Addictions Research Training (IMPART). She also received this year's 1989 Commemorative Ecole Polytechnique Doctoral Award from the Canadian Federation of University Women

The offenders were convicted and serving sentences throughout B.C. The two-year study was undertaken as a large-scale collaboration between the [provincial government](#) and SFU to examine interactions between health and public safety.

It's the first study of its kind to use such a large and diverse sample, says Julian Somers, an SFU health sciences professor on the research team. "This study highlights the fact that substance use problems are associated with reoffending," he says.

"These individuals are already being identified by the [health care system](#). If they received better and more effective treatment then perhaps they would offend less often. This shows that healthcare does have an impact on public safety."

The researchers say targeted, evidence-based partnerships between the health and corrections sectors are needed.

In another major study published today, researchers found that providing support for homeless people with mental illness via a Housing First approach leads to significantly lower rates of crime than if they receive typical care from city services.

Somers says it's the first evidence that housing and support are effective in crime reduction. More than 500 homeless people and numerous collaborators, representing agencies serving the homeless, took part in the Vancouver-based study.

The paper marks a major contribution internationally towards demonstrating the relationship between homelessness and crime, Somers adds, noting that further publications are expected from the nearly \$30 million research project over the next year.

The study, "[Housing First Reduces Re-offending among Formerly Homeless Adults with Mental Disorders: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial](#)" is published today in the journal *PLOS ONE*.

**More information:** [www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0072946](http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0072946)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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