

Study finds little federal funding for incarceration-related research

March 8 2023, by Bill Bangert



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Research from the University of Cincinnati finds a lack of federal

funding for incarceration-related research. The study looked at data from the Department of Justice, National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation, some of which dated back to 1985.

The study was published recently in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

"We have very little evidence-based research on how and when to intervene with children and families when someone is removed from the home due to [incarceration](#), especially on how to assist people who are released from prison and jail with continuity of care. I think all of this relates," says Samantha Boch, Ph.D., of the UC College of Nursing and lead investigator on the study.

"What's funded at our federal level dictates what our [evidence base](#) is, dictates priorities, and this lack of federal focus on incarceration reflects, at best, a large oversight."

Boch says the research found that any project involving keywords such as "justice," "prison" or "jail" was funded at less than half a percent since 1985. That pales in comparison to funded projects involving other systems such as education and the military.

"We lead the world in incarceration and, yet, we're not studying it from a public [health](#) lens or from a scientific research standpoint," says Boch, who says there are several possible reasons for that. "I think it relates to structural racism, the business of incarceration, a lack of awareness, a lack of training among health professions and even a lack of justice-health data linkages to adequately analyze."

One of the focuses of Boch's research is the impact parental incarceration has on [child health](#). She says this study found just 21 projects out of 3.2 million across the three agencies have been funded related to children who have incarcerated parents and which she

describes as a shockingly low amount for such a massive system.

Boch says another challenge facing incarceration-related research is how isolated the NIH is, with 27 different institutes or centers that focus on diseases, aging or cancer, and few institutes acknowledge incarcerated population care settings in their strategic plans.

Boch's interest in incarceration-related research started when she worked as a staff nurse at several [correctional facilities](#) in Ohio, including the Ohio Reformatory for Women, Madison Correctional Institution and Franklin Medical Center from 2012 to 2017.

She theorizes that if the United States continues to lead the world in incarceration rates, the country will continue to see racial and economic disparities in health and poor health outcomes. unless we start integrating, thinking, and researching how this relates.

"It's frustrating for me in a different way because I used to work in prisons. I still think about those patients and experiences I had and how poor the care was inside. It's deeply frustrating," says Boch. "But I think every little study matters, and I hope that there is more awareness but also change in my lifetime, because it's been such a long-standing problem."

Boch is grateful for the multidisciplinary team on this study.

"We had Jordan 'J.P.' Pollard, UC doctoral student, as a [social worker](#) and Aaron Murnan, Ph.D., a marriage and [family therapist](#) in the UC College of Nursing, plus a nurse, epidemiologist, developmental psychologist/policy expert and health services researcher," many of whom have worked with justice-involved populations.

More information: Samantha J. Boch et al, Assessment of US Federal

Funding of Incarceration-Related Research, 1985 to 2022, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.0803](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.0803)

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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