

Study reveals prison releasees more likely to return to medically underserved communities

July 21 2023, by Tim Sproles



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

In a new study, Florida State University researchers find that previously incarcerated individuals are more likely to return to communities unable to meet their health care needs.

Researchers have long known that incarcerated individuals experience increased [health problems](#) but the [interdisciplinary study](#) by Joseph A. Schwartz, Sonja E. Siennick, and Young-An Kim, of the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Professor Tyra Dark, assistant professor in FSU's Center for Translational Behavioral Science shows communities with a higher rate of prison returnees are more likely to lack [medical services](#) to meet demand.

The study, published in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* also found the effects of this were felt disproportionately as communities with more Black returnees were more likely to be medically underserved.

"While we found significant differences between Black and white returning individuals, we did not see as much difference between Latino and [white individuals](#)—that surprised us," Schwartz said. "We expected to see a much more significant difference than we did."

The researchers reviewed data from various sources, including information on 256,000 prison releases from the Florida Department of Corrections between 2008-2017.

A possible factor in decreasing health disparities between Latinos and whites may be increased access to health care, with some studies showing the Affordable Care Act helping to close that gap.

Schwartz cautioned against treating Latinos and Hispanics as a single group.

"Previous research has also found that improved access is not universal across Latino subgroups," he said. "We cannot consider Latinos or Hispanics a monolithic racial and ethnic group. There are individuals from Central America, Cuba, Mexico, and South America, all with

different backgrounds that make them unique."

He added, "Unfortunately, our data does not allow us to get into that level of granularity. Future research aimed at better disentangling the more nuanced intersections between race and ethnicity and how such differences may contribute to differential access to health care among specific Latino subgroups and observed health disparities more broadly would be beneficial."

With that in mind, the team plans to follow-up this study and examine how trends observed in the current study might carry over to the years during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The authors suggest that lawmakers consider incarceration return rates when determining funding for community-based services. Increased availability of such services would facilitate more successful reentry outcomes, including [health care](#) access, and provide much-needed resources offering broader community-wide benefits.

More information: Joseph A Schwartz et al, Racial and ethnic differences in the availability of community medical services after leaving prison, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/jech-2022-220222](https://doi.org/10.1136/jech-2022-220222)

Provided by Florida State University

Citation: Study reveals prison releasees more likely to return to medically underserved communities (2023, July 21) retrieved 22 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-reveals-prison-releasees-medically-underserved.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.