

research snapshot

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What affects whether people with intellectual disability who come into contact with the police get arrested?

What is this research about?

When individuals with intellectual disability come into contact with police because of a crisis, a number of things can happen. They can be arrested, taken to an emergency room, or have the issue resolved on the spot. However, research suggests that these outcomes might be more about the views that others have about people with intellectual disability, and less about their actual behaviour. It's important to understand which situations involving police result in which outcomes, since individuals with intellectual disability are very vulnerable when they end up in jail.

What did the researcher do?

Researchers in Ontario looked at 138 cases where adults with intellectual disability had experienced a crisis episode that resulted in police contact. They looked at several possible outcomes of police contact, including whether these individuals were arrested, taken to the emergency department, or had the issue resolved at the scene. The researchers considered whether these outcomes could be linked to the individual's age, gender, current diagnoses, level of intellectual disability, where they were living at the time of the incident (alone, with family, or in a group home), and the type of crisis that

What you need to know:

The most important factors affecting the outcome of police contact for adults with intellectual disability were: previous involvement with the police; where they were living at the time of the crisis incident (alone, with family, or in a group home); and the type of crisis that resulted in police contact (for example, whether it involved physical aggression or suicidal behaviour).

resulted in police involvement (for example, whether the incident involved physical aggression, psychiatric symptoms, suicidal behaviour, property damage, etc.).

What did the researcher find?

Around 10% of crisis episodes involving police contact resulted in the individual with intellectual disability being arrested. All individuals who showed suicidal behaviour were taken to the emergency department. When comparing all three outcomes (being arrested, taken to the emergency department, and having the issue resolved on the spot):

- individuals who had previously been involved with the criminal justice system were more likely to be arrested and less likely to be taken to the emergency department compared to people who had never been involved with the police;
- individuals who were living alone or with family were more likely than individuals living in a group home to either be arrested or brought to the emergency department; and
- individuals who were physically aggressive were more likely to be arrested than those who showed other types of crisis behaviour.

How can you use this research?

This research could be useful for professionals in the criminal justice system and for caregivers and service providers working with individuals with intellectual disability. It can help people understand how the outcomes of police contact might be different depending on the specific situation of the person with intellectual disability. It shows which adults with intellectual disability are most vulnerable to being arrested when they come into contact with police because of a crisis.

About the researchers

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This Research Snapshot is based on an article that has been critically appraised for quality and susceptibility to bias.

Evidence Exchange Network (EENet; formerly OMHAKEN) has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University** to produce Research Snapshots in the field of mental health and addictions in Ontario. EENet actively promotes the use of research evidence in decision-making by supporting engagement and connections between researchers and mental health and addictions stakeholders across Ontario. EENet works to develop targeted KT products and tools and supports interactive exchanges. It is supported by the Ontario Government and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. This summary was written by Andrea Flynn.

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