

**EVALUATING ADMINISTERED DIFFERENCES OF BRIEF JAIL MENTAL HEALTH  
SCREENER AND IMPACTS OF DIAGNOSES & TREATMENT OF LINKED  
INMATES WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS**

**PREDICTING CHANGES IN SOCIAL STIGMAS SURROUNDING MENTAL HEALTH  
AS A RESULT OF INCREASED USE OF REMOTE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

An Undergraduate Thesis Portfolio  
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By

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## **SOCIOTECHNICAL SYNTHESIS**

An estimated ten times more individuals suffering severe mental illness in the US are housed in jails and prisons, where they are barred from services to treat their illness, than in psychiatric hospitals as of a 2014 report from the Treatment Advocacy Center by Torrey et al. An ongoing research project out of Systems Engineering students at UVA seeks to better understand this population of inmates suffering severe mental illness. The findings about this population, as well as how members are identified and offered mental health services, are communicated to local stakeholders in the criminal justice system to inform policy decisions to better meet the needs of this population. The STS research seeks to understand the effects that COVID-19 and remote mental health services will have on mental illness stigma. The findings of the STS research support future work on the technical project, as two influential unknown factors in the intersection of criminal justice and mental illness are mental illness stigma and the social impacts that COVID-19 has on the systems in place to provide inmates mental illness services.

The primary focus of the ongoing technical research project this year was the Brief Jail Mental Health Screener (BJMHS). The BJMHS is a tool used in jails across the US to assess if an inmate shows signs of severe mental illness and should be referred to further services. To better understand its implementation in local jails, as well as who is being referred by the BJMHS and why. Data on inmates, screener results and mental health services was provided to by Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail, Central Virginia Regional Jail, the Jefferson Area Community Corrections Office of Aid and Restoration, and Region Ten Community Services.

Exploratory analysis of the datasets provided by the organizations partnered with the project shed light on trends in the BJMHS. External factors such as sex and race appear to have an impact on the likelihood of an individual being referred, with women and white individuals

screening in at a proportionally higher rate than men or black individuals. Trends in the usage of psychological services and diagnoses of individuals referred by the BJMHS are different than that of inmates who were not referred suggest the BJMHS does successfully capture individuals suffering severe mental illness.

One of the many immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was an immediate and drastic restructuring of the mental health services industry to a primarily remote format, made possible by telehealth technologies such as videoconferencing software and instant messaging services. The STS research seeks to determine if this structural change has affected or will affect mental illness stigma, and if so, what might these changes be. Existing sociological research on mental illness stigma as well as effective interventions to combat said stigma were analyzed along with research on the effectiveness of telehealth as an alternative to in-person mental health services to create a SCOT model, as described by Pinch and Bijker, focusing on telehealth technologies and mental illness stigma from notable social groups.

The research failed to predict a uniform trend in overall severity of mental illness stigma, but instead identified various traditional sources of stigma and how the influence of these sources is affected by widespread adoption of telehealth technologies. Generally, decreased social interaction may contribute to stigma from communities of individuals suffering mental illness becoming less influential, whereas the same decreased social interaction, as well as the remote nature of telehealth services, may increase the influence of mental illness stigma on oneself.

While these predictions on mental illness stigma changing as a result of the employment of remote mental health services are initially concerning for the ongoing technical research project, the STS report should inform further research in the technical project and allow for a better understanding of inmate treatment patterns that may be affected by mental illness stigma.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

### **SOCIOTECHNICAL SYNTHESIS**

#### **EVALUATING ADMINISTERED DIFFERENCES OF BRIEF JAIL MENTAL HEALTH SCREENER AND IMPACTS OF DIAGNOSES & TREATMENT OF LINKED INMATES WITH SEVERE MENTAL ILLNESS**

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