

# **Thesis Project Portfolio**

## **High Utilizers of the Albemarle and Charlottesville Criminal Justice System**

(Technical Report)

## **Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training: A First Step in Untangling the Mental Health and Criminal Justice Systems in the United States**

(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

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## **Sociotechnical Synthesis**

Across the United States, vulnerable groups of people are getting caught in the criminal justice system, causing them to be unable to successfully reintegrate into society. High utilizers of the criminal justice system are one of these groups, defined as an individual that has been booked into jail four or more times within a one-year time period (Kumer, 2024, n.p.). Another of these groups is those suffering from a mental health crisis that get entangled with the system due to a lack of training of police officers to handle such situations. The criminal justice system is failing to provide support for vulnerable individuals leading to their continuous entanglement with said system.

High utilizers of the criminal justice system are unable to successfully reintegrate into society, and were found to be a relatively small group that uses disproportionately more resources than non-high utilizers. For the technical research, our goals consisted of determining the characteristics of high utilizers through data analysis, piecing together the process from arrest to first court date through expert interviews, and understanding the lifecycle of arrests of high utilizers. In the Albemarle-Charlottesville Regional Jail (ACRJ), high utilizers consisted of approximately 7% of the jail population but accounted for nearly 30% of the jail bookings. This was found using a dataset from 01-01-22 to 11-12-24 from the ACRJ. My team was able to determine that high utilizers have almost five times more bookings per person than non-high utilizers. Each time a high utilizer returns to custody, they go through a lengthy and complex process that involves multiple criminal justice agencies, utilizing both their time and resources. This return is often for contempt of court or probation, which are linked to previous offenses.

A lack of integration of mental health services within the criminal justice system leads to the criminalization of individuals facing mental health challenges, which perpetuates the

entanglement of the criminal justice and mental health systems. A major mental illness diagnosis was associated with more than a 50% increase in the odds of a jail sentence for misdemeanor arrestees (Hall et al., 2019, p.1093). For my STS research, I looked into whether the nationwide implementation of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training programs in law enforcement agencies can provide a first step in untangling the mental health and criminal justice systems. CIT training programs are designed to teach police officers strategies and techniques for de-escalation when responding to a mental health crisis but are not mandatory nationwide (Hassell, 2020, p.159). Using academic research, case studies, and an interview with Crisis Intervention Specialist Tom von Hemert, I determined that CIT training programs have only been added to police departments in less than 16% of the United States, regardless of their positive impact on the mindset of police officers towards those suffering from a mental illness (NAMI, 2024, n.p.). Additionally, when looking into the positive effects of CIT training on the communities it is implemented in, I discovered a gap in research. The impacts of CIT training on communities have not been studied due to a lack of objective metrics to measure the success of this training using qualitative evidence.

Overall, CIT training is effective at reducing the mental health stigma for law enforcement officers by providing them with necessary skills when responding to someone suffering from a mental health crisis. While there is a lack of studies done on the efficacy of CIT training on the skills of police officers, changing the mentality around those suffering from a mental illness across law enforcement agencies can help address the lack of support for these vulnerable individuals. Our research laid the groundwork for future researchers to dive deeper into the demographics of high utilizers and provide solutions to the support necessary for this vulnerable population to successfully reintegrate into society.

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