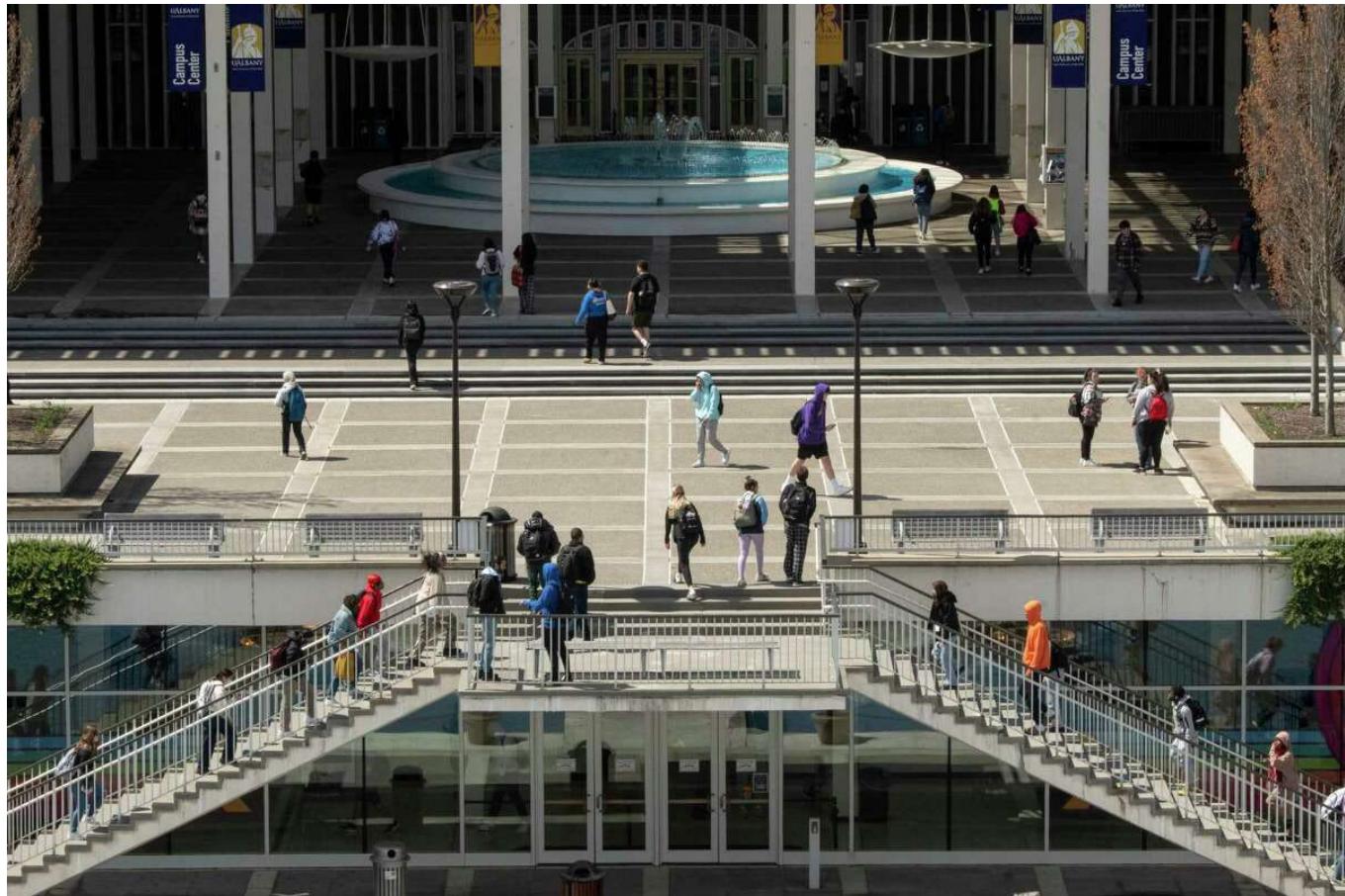




UAlbany Study: Incarceration at Young Age a Suicide Risk Factor

[Rachel Silberstein](#)

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University at Albany students walk to and from classes at the Academic Podium at the Uptown Campus on Wednesday, April 27, 2022 in Albany, N.Y. Lori Van Buren/Times Union

ALBANY — A history of incarceration may increase suicide attempts, particularly for women who were incarcerated at a young age, according to a new study from the University at Albany School of Public Health.

[The study](#), led by doctoral student Maggie Smith and published in *Community Mental Health Journal*, is one of the first population-based studies to examine the relationship between a history of suicide attempt, age of incarceration and sex.

Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the United States in 2019. Past research shows elevated suicide rates among people who have been incarcerated, with risk highest in the first year after release.

The literature shows mental health and substance abuse issues are higher among people who have been incarcerated. Many have trouble accessing medical and mental health services in jail and even after their release, have difficulty accessing care because of a lack of employment and insurance, according to Smith.

“Much research focuses on current incarceration and those who have been released within a year,” said Smith, who is working on her doctorate in epidemiology. “But life continues on after they hit the one-year mark, and we need to better understand the possible long-term implications of mass incarceration and how we can reduce suicide attempts.”

Smith worked with Tomoko Udo, associate professor in Health Policy, Management and Behavior, to estimate the lifetime prevalence of suicide attempts based on the age of incarceration and filter the results by sex, based on the National Survey of Alcohol and Related Conditions III.

Those who had a history of incarceration had a higher likelihood of dying by suicide in their lifetimes compared to those who had not been incarcerated, with an even higher likelihood for those who were incarcerated as youth.

While women were typically jailed for shorter periods than men, women who were incarcerated in youth had the highest likelihood of a suicide attempt. Women who were incarcerated as juveniles were also more likely to have a psychiatric disorder and report traumatic childhood experiences.

“Historically, reentry programs have focused on the needs of men at the time of their release,” Smith said. “Criminal activity from women often comes from drug use after physical or sexual abuse, so it is important that reentry programs adequately address sex-specific needs for women to help reduce lifetime risk for suicide attempts in this population.”