

IACFP Bulletin

RESEARCH
PRACTICE
POLICY



from The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology

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WHO WE ARE

The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP)



The International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP) is an organization of behavioral scientists and practitioners who are concerned with the delivery of high-quality mental health services to justice-involved individuals, and with promoting and disseminating research on the etiology, prevention, assessment, and treatment of criminal behavior.

IACFP members are not all psychologists and are not all active in the practice of forensic evaluations or correctional mental health. However, they typically have advanced degrees in behavioral sciences and engage in the administration, practice, teaching or research relating to incarcerated populations and those under community supervision. We have been promoting evidence-based and practitioner-informed practices and research to support correctional and forensic psychologists and other helping professionals who work with justice-involved individuals since 1954. Our goals are to:

- Promote the development of psychological practice in criminal justice and law enforcement settings.
- Contribute toward appropriate teaching of the psychology of crime, delinquency, and criminal justice.
- Support the development and application of effective treatment approaches for individuals in the care of the criminal justice system.
- Stimulate research into the nature of criminal behavior, to exchange such scientific information, and to publish the reports of scholarly studies of criminal behavior.
- Concern ourselves with relevant public, professional, and institutional issues that affect or are affected by the practice of psychology in the criminal justice system.

Our current areas of focus for funded projects are:

- Professional development
- International practice and an international leadership network
- Community corrections

We are now accepting submissions.

The *IACFP Bulletin* has six issues per year, and is now accepting submissions. To inquire how to submit, please email executivedirectoriacfp@gmail.com with your proposed article topic.

Summary: Sport-based interventions and health in prisons: The impact of Twinning Project on prisoner wellbeing and attitudes

BILAL DARDAI / DEC 2024

The *Journal of Health Psychology* has recently published a study by Linus Peitz and Marsha Newsome that examines ways to improve mental health in prisons and the positive effects of building social relationships between prisoners. These support networks have been shown to reduce the risks of mental health issues and re-offending. The research specifically focuses on the Twinning Project, an initiative that introduces a structured football (soccer) program into UK-based correctional facilities. The researchers found that the activities of the Twinning Project produced substantial benefits for the participants, including higher levels of wellbeing and satisfaction of psychological needs.

Background

Numerous studies have demonstrated that incarcerated individuals experience high levels of mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression. This has led to higher-than-average rates of attempted suicide and a higher likelihood of recidivism for justice-involved individuals, which has prompted further consideration of methods that may alleviate these risks.

Social cure theory proclaims that values, attitudes, and behaviors – an individual’s social identity – is constructed largely due to their sense of belonging within certain social groups. This theory forms a basis for the adoption of sports-focused programs within correctional settings, which offer structure and social engagement opportunities for incarcerated individuals. Assessment of programs offering yoga, dance, and rugby participation in

prisons have indicated a link to positive mental wellbeing and lower rates of recidivism.

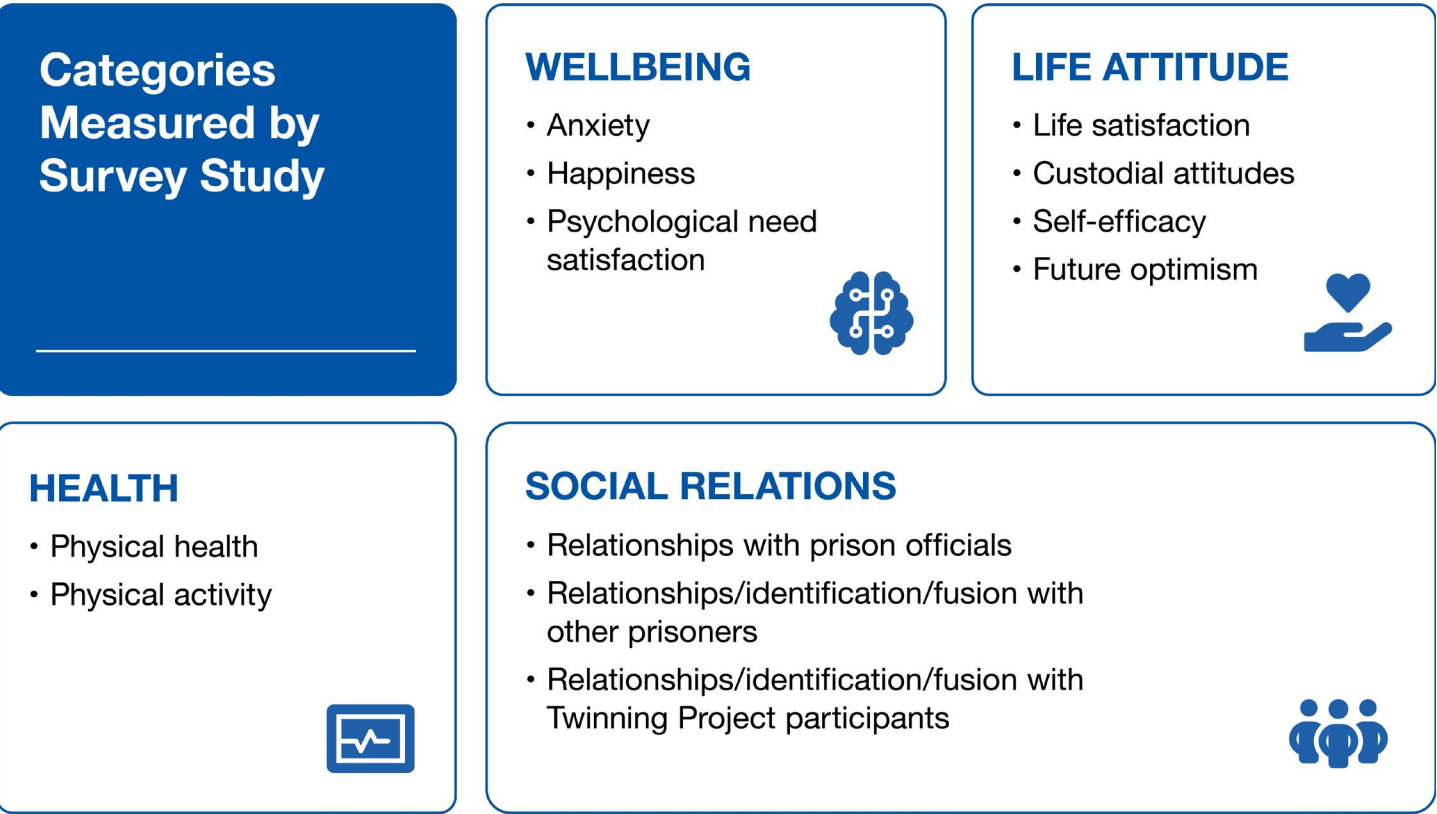
The Twinning Project pairs professional UK football clubs with local prisons to provide training in entry-level coaching and refereeing, with the aim of improving self-esteem and employability for participants. Candidates for participation must apply of their own accord and meet the following criteria:

- Individuals must demonstrate minimum levels of fitness and literacy
- Individuals must not have committed a sexual offense
- Individuals designated as having lower Incentive and Earned Privilege (IEP) status may not participate
- Individuals must be within 1-2 years of release

The program is delivered to cohorts of 10-15 prisoners, led by a team that includes at least one prison officer and one member of the football club’s coaching staff.

“A recent meta-analysis...evaluated the overall impact of sport-based programmes, showing moderate effects on crime-related outcomes (including reoffence rates, self-reported behaviour and attitudes related to crime) and large effects on psychological outcomes (including self-esteem, stress-related burdens and depressive symptoms.)”

Programs are designed to last for at least five sessions over a span of 1-12 weeks.



Process

The subjects of the study were asked to complete two surveys administered at the first Twinning Project session and the final session. These surveys were adapted from a design by His Majesty’s Prison Service (HMPS) with additional metrics added by the researchers to measure:

- **Physical health**, including general wellness and level of activity
- **Emotional wellbeing**, including factors such as anxiety, happiness, and meeting of psychological needs
- **Life satisfaction**, including feelings of confidence in one's own abilities, optimism for the future, and willingness to work on behaviors that had led to their criminal offense
- **Social relations**, which examines the identification prisoners have with fellow inmates and prison guards in comparison to their cohorts in the Twinning Project.

The survey made use of multiple measurement frameworks, including the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (WEMBS) to assess wellbeing and both the Postmes, et al single-item scale and Swann et al pictorial scale to measure social relations.

Key Findings and Interpretations

Initial observations of collected data from completed cases indicated an overall positive shift across most measures, with significant positive changes for life satisfaction, psychological need satisfaction, and confidence in self-efficacy. Social identification with the Twinning Project also increased throughout the program, although identification with other prisoners and prison guards showed little deviation. This growth in identification with the Twinning Project also seemed to correlate with growth in need satisfaction, although no other measures showed similar results. Participants with

disabilities expressed higher levels of life satisfaction after the program’s completion.

The researchers also used the Hayes Process Macro for SPSS to see how indirect effects of a shift in identity would affect emotional wellbeing, and noted an increase in future optimism and happiness, as well as a decrease in anxiety.

“We see the Twinning Project as an opportunity for groups of participants who are stigmatised or otherwise excluded from mainstream curricula to participate in a meaningful way. These are groups not actively encouraged to participate, such as those with a history of trauma, with experience of the care leaver system or with poor behaviour in prison.”

Conclusions

The Twinning Project’s focus on football – one of the world’s most popular group activities – allows the program a greater degree of appeal compared to similar interventions. Based on this study, the researchers stated that the impact of the Twinning Project has been especially positive for emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction among participants. They also concluded that the relationship between feelings of identification with the program and improved optimism, life satisfaction, and efficacy showed evidence for the veracity of social cure theory.

The researchers did note, however, the limitations present in this study. Due to the selection criteria of the program, the researchers were unable to establish a control group from the general population and extrapolate any findings beyond the sample set. Institutional differences and a lack of digital data infrastructure also hindered the capacity to link data across sources. Additionally, although the

Twining Project is designed to serve both male and female prisoners, at this time no female participants were included, which leaves a gap in the study’s understanding of unique health needs for each population. The researchers also express the need for a complementary study that looks at how sustainable the effects of the program are for participants after release.

Despite these challenges, the study illustrates the promise of programs like the Twinning Project in improving the wellbeing of incarcerated individuals, and offers a model to follow for other correctional facilities who seek to deliver similar impact.

Source

“Sport-based interventions and health in prisons: The impact of Twinning Project on prisoner wellbeing and attitudes” (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/13591053241272188>)

Note

On a yearly basis, the ICPA Practice Transfer Advisory Committee chooses one or two examples of exciting practices that have been highlighted during the ICPA Annual Conference. The Committee then supports and connects jurisdictions where there is interest in replicating that practice. The Twinning Project was one of the first projects selected for implementing the idea of intentional practice transfer.

About Our Student Research Award Winners

In this issue of the *Bulletin* we're proud to share a preview of the criminological studies currently being pursued by 2024's IACFP Student Research Award winners, **Cooper Sparks** and **Charlie Aelick**.



Cooper Sparks is a third-year doctoral student in Southern Illinois University's Clinical Psychology Ph.D. program. Her research interests include justice-involved persons with mental illness, justice-involved women, and correctional mental health treatment.

After completing her graduate

work, Cooper hopes to continue both her research and clinical work to provide effective services and further our understanding of justice-involved populations.

Her research project, "The Assessment Utility of Project Choices: An E-Health Technology Tool" is currently in progress, and we present an early overview here. Sparks intends to present her team's findings at the Annual Conference of the American Psychology-Law Society in San Juan, Puerto Rico in March 2025.



Charlie Aelick is a PhD candidate in Clinical Psychology at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Her forthcoming project is titled "Barriers to Successful Reintegration among Indigenous Women in Contact with the Canadian

Legal System," which aims to understand Indigenous women's experiences in Canada's legal system, identify needs and strengths to inform culturally specific risk and protective factors, and recognize gaps in existing services. For IACFP, she here offers a thoughtful, evidence-supported essay on how researchers should consider and pursue ethical, community-centered practices when engaging with this vulnerable population.

The Assessment Utility of *Project Choices*: An E-Health Technology Tool

COOPER SPARKS / DEC 2024

Between 2020 and 2021, approximately 5,444,900 individuals were supervised within United States correctional institutions (Carson & Kluckow, 2023). Within this population are varying mental health concerns and levels of threat to public safety (Alsan et al., 2023). In the leading Risk-Needs-Responsivity model of correctional rehabilitation, treatment focuses on criminogenic needs (i.e., criminal friends, antisocial attitudes, substance use) which have been shown to reduce an individual's risk to reoffend (Bonta & Andrews, 2016; Goodley, 2022; Probst et al., 2020). Therefore, correctional interventions are implemented to address varying criminogenic needs and mental health concerns. However, conducting criminal risk assessments or mental health assessments to identify individual needs often requires costly and time-intensive comprehensive assessments, causing many individuals to be overlooked.

In a field that is frequently understaffed and underfunded (Link & Reece, 2021), assessing each individual's criminogenic and mental health needs is burdensome at best, and not feasible at worst. Therefore, there is a growing consensus for a need for a comprehensive, cost-effective, and timely assessment tool that can assess the threat to public safety, as well as the mental health needs of justice-involved individuals. One potential tool is *Project Choices*.

Project Choices is a newly developed virtual video game consisting of everyday scenarios commonly encountered by justice-involved individuals to aid in decision-making, problem-solving, and cognitive-behavioral skills. The goal of the game is to remain out of prison by not violating parole over a "two-week" simulated period. Previously,

“...the current study aims to evaluate if *Project Choices* could accurately classify an individual's simulated mental health and criminogenic needs prior to field testing in a correctional environment. It was hypothesized that *Project Choices* would accurately classify an individual's risk to reoffend and distinguish between those with simulated mental illness and those without mental illness.”

Project Choices was pilot tested as an intervention tool demonstrating treatment utility (see Diehl et al., 2023), but the assessment utility of *Project Choices* has not been examined. Therefore, the current study aims to evaluate if *Project Choices* could accurately classify an individual's simulated mental health and criminogenic needs prior to field testing in a correctional environment. It was hypothesized that *Project Choices* would accurately classify an individual's risk to reoffend and distinguish between those with simulated mental illness and those without mental illness.

To examine the assessment utility of *Project Choices*, undergraduate students enrolled in a midwestern university were recruited. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups:

1. a control group (normal response group)
2. a simulated high risk to reoffend group
3. a simulated mental illness (i.e., depression) group.

Participants in the experimental groups were given an example case that represented an individual with a high risk of reoffending or an individual with major depressive

disorder and were instructed to respond to questions and play *Project Choices* accordingly. Participants in the control group were instructed to answer the assessment honestly and play *Project Choices* as themselves. All individuals were administered the Level of Service Inventory-Revised: Screener Version (LSI-R: SV) to assess their simulated risk level, and participants completed the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) and Depression, Hopelessness, and Suicide (DHS) self-report measure to assess the severity of their reported or simulated mental health symptoms. Participants then

played *Project Choices* for 20 minutes based on their assigned experimental condition.

Data collection is in progress and will be completed by November 2024. The *Project Choices* game statistics will be evaluated for each experimental group to assess *Project Choice*'s utility in classifying criminal risk levels and mental health needs. It is anticipated that the results of this study will determine if *Project Choices* has potential utility as a cost-effective and timely assessment tool.

Navigating Two Worlds: A Settler's Experiences Developing Community-Centered Research with Indigenous Peoples

CHARLIE AELICK / DEC 2024

I am a white settler in Mi'kma'ki, the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. As a component of my PhD in clinical psychology, I am in the process of completing a dissertation examining the experiences of Indigenous women who have been incarcerated in Canada. My upbringing was deeply influenced by close relationships with Indigenous peoples, particularly Métis and Anishinaabe communities. Through personal experiences and story-sharing, I gained insight into the histories and lasting impacts of colonization. In adulthood, while providing counseling at a jail in Anishinaabe territory, I met an Elder who offered programming for Indigenous people in the institution. Through him, I learned about the more personal consequences of the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian carceral system. His words have stayed with me, deepening my commitment to culturally informed research and clinical practice.

Ethical research with Indigenous communities requires a commitment to culturally informed practices. In Canada, ethical frameworks attempt to address the harms caused by researchers to Indigenous peoples. For example, ethics boards have adopted the *First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession* (OCAP®), which guide the relationship between Indigenous groups and academic institutions and requires researchers to consider who owns, controls, has access to, and retains data resulting from collaborations with Indigenous peoples (FNIGC, 2014). Indigenous researchers have also developed data-interpretation guidelines such as

Two-Eyed Seeing, which incorporates both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing when interpreting data (Marshall et al., 2015). These principles are foundational to ethical research and must be integrated in the design and conduct of any study from the outset.

This essay reflects on my experiences applying these guidelines in practice, emphasizing the personal actions I have found to be most important — actions that are not necessarily codified by ethics boards, but which have been critical to fostering positive, meaningful community relationships. While this essay may provide insights for academics pursuing community-based research with diverse groups, it is grounded in my specific experiences working with one particular community. These reflections are intended as a starting point, but the main message of this essay is to remain open in your collaborations and to adapt to the needs of the community. For a broader discussion of best practices from the perspectives of Indigenous peoples, I recommend resources such as Hayward et al. (2021), Smith (2012), Marshall et al. (2015), and the FNIGC website.

Know Yourself

Research begins with a question: Long before the involvement of ethics boards there will be an idea that eventually grows into a design. When working with groups you are not a member of, the design process must start with self-reflection. Why are you motivated to take on

“The most critical aspect of self-reflection is addressing biases and assumptions about outcomes. This requires checking biases and decolonizing learning. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating harm through microaggressions, minimization of community experiences, or reinforcing stereotypes.”

this work? What connection do you have to it? What are your assumptions about the study or outcomes? In the first paragraph of this essay, I share my connection to Indigenous lands and personal experiences as a settler, addressing the first two questions. This approach to self-introduction was taught to me by Indigenous colleagues in academia and psychology. Reflecting on our motivations is most crucial when our work impacts communities directly. For instance, my research examining the experiences of Indigenous women incarcerated in Canada is a sensitive topic that could be re-traumatizing, so I needed to ensure I was in a position to minimize harm. Once I was clear on my intentions, I reached out to the local community to gauge their interest in the research and seek out community collaborators. Although approaching community members with a research proposal can be intimidating, transparency helps make these interactions open and accessible.

The most critical aspect of self-reflection is addressing biases and assumptions about outcomes. This requires checking biases and decolonizing learning. Otherwise, we risk perpetuating harm through microaggressions, minimization of community experiences, or reinforcing stereotypes. These biases can affect all stages of research from data collection to analysis and interpretation in ways that perpetuate harmful stereotypes and are not reflective of the nuanced experiences under study. Decolonizing this process is an ongoing effort, requiring non-defensive openness to feedback and correction when missteps occur. For me, this has involved both formal learning, such as reading works by Indigenous authors, and informal learning, like listening

to Indigenous stories from friends in my life and on social media. Most importantly, it has meant seeking out this information independently.

Know Your Community

Challenging your biases requires not only an understanding of how colonization has shaped your perspective, but also knowledge of the community you intend to work with. This means taking the time to learn about the community’s history, traditions, and ongoing struggles. While ethical guidelines may require community consultation, seeking input only because it is mandated is insufficient. True engagement begins long before the formal research process — it starts with building relationships and trust. Researchers have harmed marginalized communities by treating participants as mere subjects rather than people with agency and dignity. Decolonizing research involves recognizing and rejecting this dehumanization.

In my experience, this means approaching research collaboratively, allowing the community’s culture and values to shape the research design. It involves attending community events, engaging in mutual sharing, and having honest conversations about potential barriers or concerns, especially given my status as a settler. It also includes engaging in local activism, which deepens my understanding of the community’s priorities and supports efforts for change. For example, understanding the importance of the topic of mass incarceration to Indigenous peoples guided decisions throughout the design process. It led us to use qualitative methods rooted in storytelling traditions and to incorporate accessibility considerations such as meeting participants in their community and involving an Elder to provide support for participants. This approach also demystified discussions about OCAP principles during the ethics process — given the heavy reliance on Indigenous knowledge and storytelling within the study, our data belongs to the community. Our community consultants

became co-investigators, contributing to the development of research questions, materials, and data interpretation. By involving the community from the start, their needs, interests, and perspectives shaped the research, making it both more ethical and more meaningful.

Know Your Institution

Understanding your institution’s history and its relationship to the community you are working with is crucial. The field of psychology and most of our existing academic institutions were developed within the context of colonization and have a legacy of harmful research practices involving Indigenous peoples. These institutions have often treated Indigenous peoples as subjects to be studied, without returning benefits or respecting their knowledge (Canadian Psychological Association, 2018; Smith, 2012). Understanding these histories and their lasting effects are important to taking a non-defensive and open approach to community work with a willingness to accept that trust takes time to build and that you may not be welcomed into a community.

Equally important is recognizing the privilege that comes with your affiliation to such institutions — privilege that can be used to advocate for the needs and interests of marginalized communities. As a researcher, it is your responsibility to advocate for the community if institutional policies conflict with their needs. This requires not only understanding both the community’s priorities and the institution’s policies, but also having the confidence to challenge harmful practices. By using institutional privilege to advocate for marginalized communities, you help ensure that their voices are heard, especially those who have been traditionally excluded from such institutions.

Conclusion

This essay has shared the lessons I have learned in developing a research project on the experiences of Indigenous women incarcerated in Canada.

Each research topic and community requires a unique approach, with varying levels of engagement and consideration. This study, with its substantial community involvement, has provided invaluable learning opportunities. Remaining open to learning from communities and allowing their needs and priorities to shape your research design enriches the experience and leads to more nuanced and holistic outcomes. I am deeply grateful to the many Indigenous friends, family, colleagues, and collaborators — especially Indigenous women — whose guidance and teachings have profoundly shaped my learning and informed the reflections shared in this essay.

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IACFP International News, Research, and Resources for Nov/Dec 2024

CHERYLN TOWNSEND / DEC 2024

We've compiled top highlights from recent research, policy, and practice resources across the world for our latest IACFP International News summary. Our topics for November and December 2024 include IACFP updates; recent research, policy, and practice; and upcoming conferences.

1 IACFP Updates

IACFP Board Planning for Future



The IACFP Board held their annual in-person meeting 28-30 October 2024 in Salem, Oregon, US. In addition to a business meeting and a facilitated

strategic planning discussion to establish future goals, the Board spent a day at the Oregon State Penitentiary learning about the Oregon Way, including their behavioral health programs and staff wellness initiatives. They also spent a morning learning about the Oregon Judicial Department's therapeutic courts, particularly their mental health courts.

During the focused planning session, the Board affirmed IACFP's intentional focus on our members and practitioners, and revised our mission statement to better reflect that focus:

Mission: To support correctional and forensic psychologists and other helping professionals who work with justice-involved individuals in order to advance the development and implementation

of evidence- and practitioner-informed policies and practices.

The Board also identified five focused strategies for the future:

1. Professional development
2. Partnerships
3. Network for Correctional Mental Health Leaders
4. Learning and research to share
5. Justice-involved/lived experience

Action plans and a proposed budget to support implementation will be considered by the board for adoption in January 2025. These will be shared in the next issue of the *IACFP Bulletin*.



Jessica Borg Nominated for IACFP President-Elect

At the recent IACFP Board meeting, Jessica Borg was nominated for the role of President-Elect, succeeding Dr. Emma Black. Below is

her statement accepting the nomination and offering her vision and credentials.

I am honoured to have been nominated to be IACFP President. I am confident that I can work effectively with our diverse and expert Board members to achieve our strategic goals.

I have 18 years' experience as a clinical psychologist in New Zealand in mental health and corrections. My roles in corrections include operational, strategic, and leadership functions. These functions involved the assessment and treatment of people with violent and sexual offences; providing reports to the Parole Board and courts; designing, reviewing, and evaluating offence-focused evidence-based rehabilitation programmes, policies, and practices. As Chief Psychologist, I lead psychology teams in second line assurance functions, research, workforce development, and programme design. I provide advice to the CEO, the Parole Board, and the Minister of Corrections, and contribute to policy and legislation review. I hold critical relationships with correctional leaders in Australia, the UK, Canada, and the US to collaborate on training and research opportunities and development of our workforces. I am passionate about human rights for people who are incarcerated and was awarded a scholarship for a Master's in Human Rights from the EU in 2006.

I believe I have the drive, skill, and experience required for President-Elect of this Board. The work of psychologists in the forensic and correctional spaces is complex and subject to significant legal and ethical challenges. I believe that IACFP can be valuable in enabling research and support for clinicians navigating these complexities. As President-Elect I would look forward to working with my colleagues on the Board to strengthen this function of our organisation.

All ballots must be received by executivedirectoriacfp@gmail.com no later than COB 30 December 2024.

2 Research

Criminological Highlights is published several times each year by the University of Toronto Criminology Department. Each issue contains conclusions for each of the eight articles included in the issue. This is then followed by summaries of each article. Since they

scan approximately 120 journals to identify interesting criminological research, IACFP members may find this a welcome support for keeping up with current research.

The most recent issue can be found at [Criminological Highlights, Vol. 21, No. 6 - November 2024](#). The questions addressed in this issue are:

1. [How should differential arrest rates across racialized groups be interpreted?](#)
2. [If a Black person has the same arrest record as a White person, have they offended equally?](#)
3. [Are "undocumented" immigrants especially likely to commit criminal offences?](#)
4. [What happens to a person's involvement in crime when they move into a neighbourhood with a high concentration of immigrants?](#)
5. [What is the most effective criminal justice response to a violation of probation?](#)
6. [Can planting grass stop crime?](#)
7. [Is urban greenspace associated with crime?](#)
8. [Should criminal justice officials "override" security classifications of youths?](#)

3 Policy

The Safer Prisons, Safer Communities campaign began in early 2024 and officially launched in November. The two founding organizations are One Voice United, which represents correctional officers, and FAMM, which represents incarcerated people and their families. It is supported by Arnold Ventures.

The campaign and partnership was driven by conditions inside prisons in the US. Safer Prisons, Safer Communities advocates for reforms that will improve the lives of corrections officers and incarcerated people alike, improve rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities,

and enhance community safety. While the campaign was established in the US, the conditions that prompted it and the reforms it seeks to achieve have global application. Learn more at the [Safer Prisons, Safer Communities website](#).

4 Upcoming Conferences



The ACA Winter Conference, 10–14 January 2025

The ACA Winter Conference will take place 10–14 January 2025 in Orlando, FL. More information on the conference as well as registration can be accessed [here](#).



Women in Corrections Conference, 19–21 February 2025

The Thailand Institute for Justice and ICPA are hosting the “Women in Corrections Conference 2025” in Bangkok, Thailand on 19–21 February 2025. Information on registration, housing, etc. will be available at [www.icpa.org](#).



Corrections Technology Conference 2025

Immediately following the Women in Corrections Conference, the ICPA will host the Corrections Technology Conference 2025 from 24–27 February 2025. More information on the conference and registration can be found at [www.icpa.org](#).

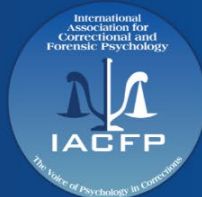


4th International Correctional Research Symposium

The theme of the 4th International Correctional Research Symposium is “From Individual to Ecosystem: Sharing Research that Matters for Corrections.” Europris and the ICPA are holding this conference, which is hosted by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), from 13–15 May 2025. If you wish to present, you are encouraged to respond to the “Call for Papers” at [this link](#) by 14 February 2025. Registration and accommodation information will be available soon.



Happy Holidays



International Association for Correctional and Forensic Psychology (IACFP)

Promoting evidence-based and practitioner-informed practices and research to support correctional and forensic psychologists and other helping professionals who work with justice-involved individuals since 1954.

Learn more about IACFP or become a member at www.myiacfp.org.