

When Mental Illness Becomes a Crime: The Path from Crisis to Incarceration

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Introduction

Many people in the criminal justice system have mental health conditions. When these illnesses go untreated, they can affect judgment, impulse control, and social interactions, making it harder to understand laws, follow rules, and avoid risky behaviors. This increases the likelihood of repeated arrests and makes reintegration into society more challenging after release. Using data from the 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates, I examined the relationship between mental health and recidivism. Mental health diagnoses included depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD, anxiety, personality disorders, and unspecified conditions. Prior incarceration was used as the measure of repeat offending, representing an individual's recidivism rate.

Findings

- Individuals diagnosed with a mental illness are more likely to reoffend than those without a diagnosis (Fig. 1).
- When mental health conditions are grouped into categories, personality disorders show the strongest association with recidivism (Fig. 2), which may be explained by research linking these disorders to higher levels of impulsivity and aggression leading to repeat offending (Martin et al., 2019).
- Recidivism is higher among males than females with a diagnosed mental illness (Fig. 3). Prior research suggests females may be more likely to follow through with mental health treatment, which may help reduce reincarceration (Drapalski et al., 2009).

Data & Literature

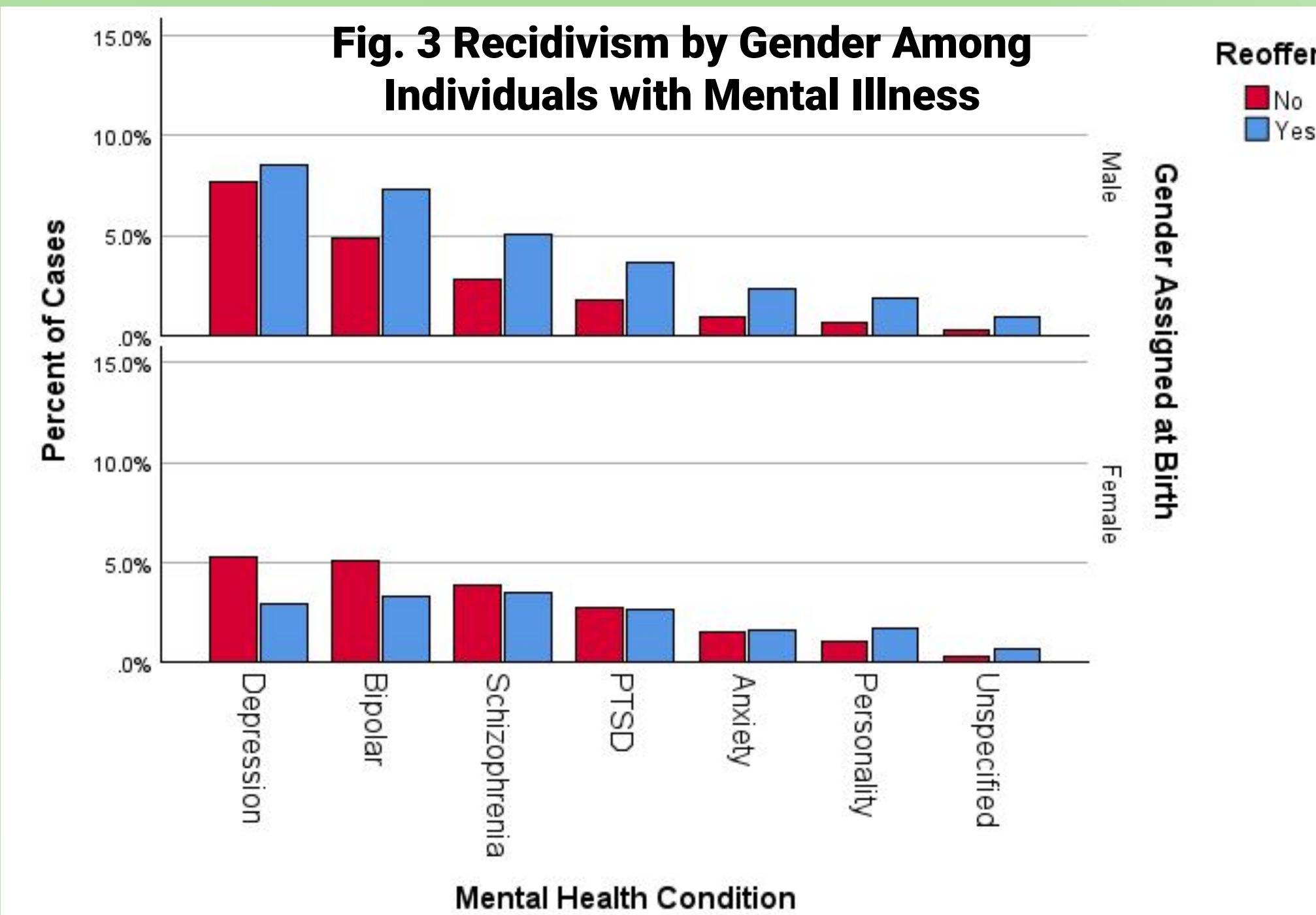
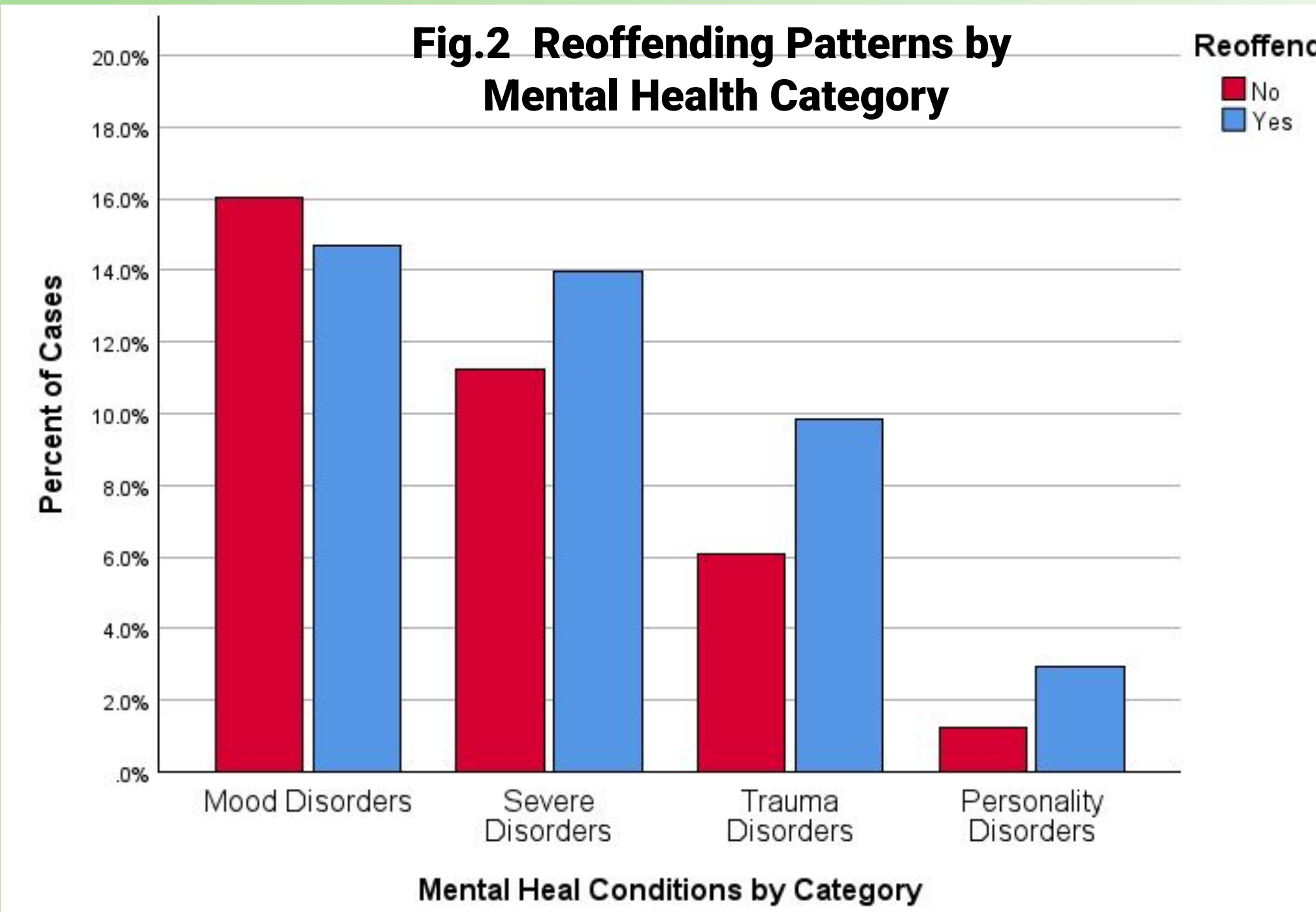
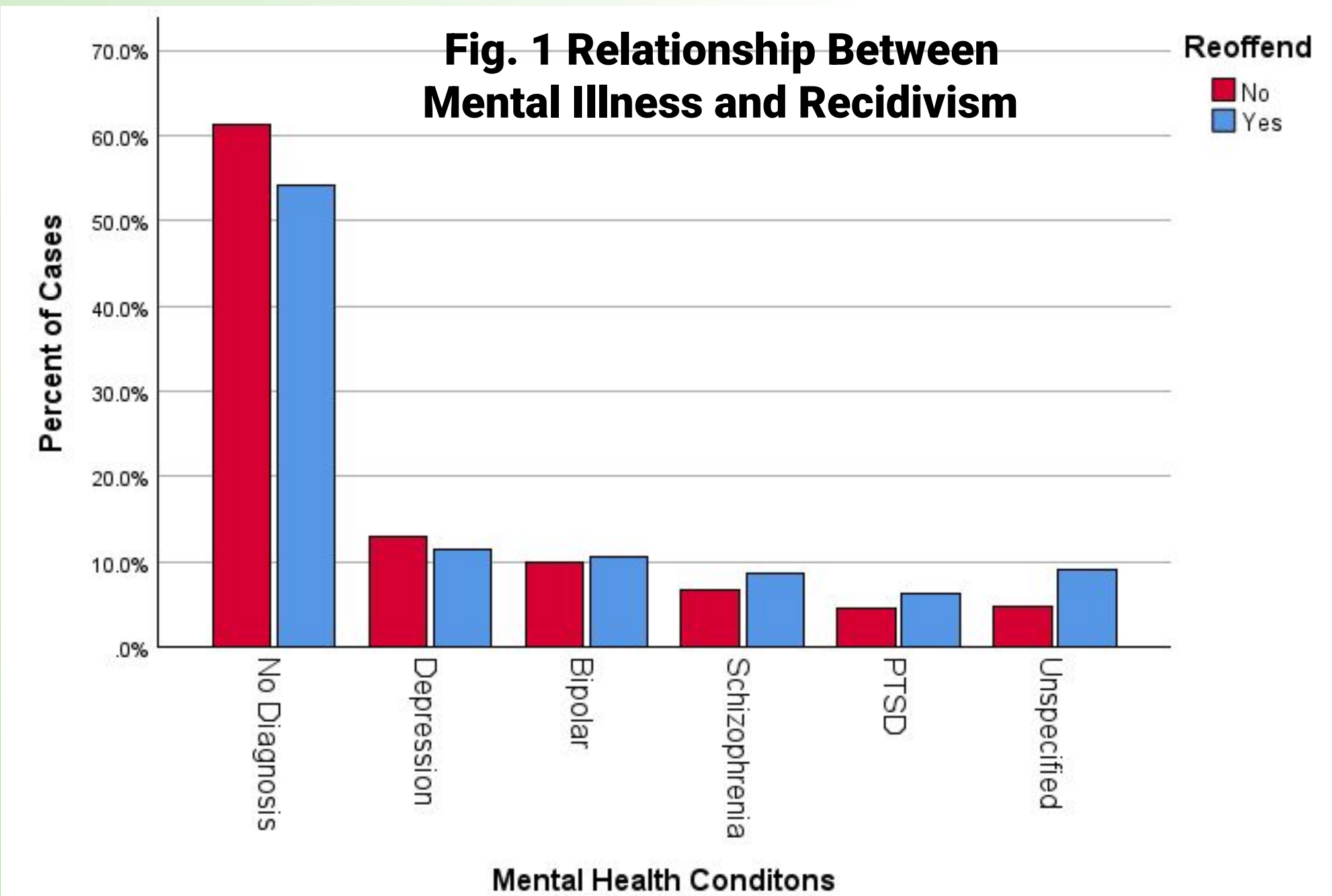
- ICPSR. (2016). *Survey of Prison Inmates, United States*.
- Martin, M. S., et al. (2019). *Aggression and Violent Behavior*.
- Drapalski, A. L., et al. (2009). *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*.
- Deconstructing Stigma. (n.d.). *Incarcerated Mental Health Guide*.

Hypothesis and Analysis

Individuals diagnosed with a mental illness are more likely to recidivate compared to individuals without a diagnosed mental illness

Recidivism will differ across broad categories of mental illness

Gender differences exist in recidivism among individuals with mental illness



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