

# Mental Health Disparities for Young Adults with Arrest History: A Survey-based, Cross-sectional Analysis

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## OBJECTIVES

This study examines how criminal justice involvement, specifically arrests, affect the mental health of adults between 18 and 25 years of age in the United States.

## BACKGROUND

Over 4.53 million arrests were made in 2021 in the United States.<sup>1</sup> People between 18-25 years of age were more likely to be arrested than older people.<sup>2</sup> Although mental health disparities are prominent in the incarcerated population, the subject has not been closely examined among young adults specifically.

## METHODS

- Data source: 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).
- Sample size: 13,494 individuals aged 18-25, with 7,330 women and 6,164 men.
- Key independent variable: History of arrest.
- Outcome variables: Depression, serious mental illness (SMI), substance use, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempt.
- Analysis: Conducted five multivariate logistic regression models for each outcome variable, separately for men and women.
- Controlled for: Race/ethnicity, income, and education level.

## RESULTS

- Out of 13,494 respondents, 6.63% had a history of arrest.
- Among young women, arrest history significantly raised the odds for all mental health concerns. Most notably, an arrest history increased the likelihood of substance use by 15.19 times and suicide attempts by 2.27 times. Moreover, the women who encountered the criminal justice system were 1.79 times more likely to have SMI, 1.75 times more likely to think about suicide, and 1.52 times more likely to have depression.
- Among young men, arrest history was associated with higher odds for substance use (adjusted odds ratio [AOR], 13.37;  $p<.001$ ), suicidal ideation (AOR, 1.45;  $p=.011$ ), and suicide attempt (AOR, 1.82;  $p=.044$ ).

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Young Women (Ages 18-25) With and Without an Arrest History (2021)

| Variable                | No Arrest History (%) | With Arrest History (%) | P Value |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Race/ethnicity          |                       |                         | 0.137   |
| White                   | 53.48                 | 51.64                   |         |
| Black/African American  | 11.91                 | 16.12                   |         |
| Hispanic/Latina         | 21.76                 | 19.70                   |         |
| Multiracial/other       | 12.85                 | 12.54                   |         |
| Education achieved      |                       |                         | <.001*  |
| High school diploma     | 89.95                 | 83.28                   |         |
| No high school diploma  | 10.05                 | 16.72                   |         |
| Income level            |                       |                         | <.001*  |
| Above poverty threshold | 71.57                 | 62.69                   |         |
| Below poverty threshold | 28.43                 | 37.31                   |         |

Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Young Men (Ages 18-25) With and Without an Arrest History (2021)

| Variable                | No Arrest History (%) | With Arrest History (%) | P Value |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Race/ethnicity          |                       |                         | .008*   |
| White                   | 54.39                 | 53.7                    |         |
| Black/African American  | 10.95                 | 15.84                   |         |
| Hispanic/Latino         | 20.55                 | 18.11                   |         |
| Multiracial/other       | 14.22                 | 12.35                   |         |
| Education achieved      |                       |                         | <.001*  |
| High school diploma     | 87.43                 | 73.87                   |         |
| No high school diploma  | 12.57                 | 26.13                   |         |
| Income level            |                       |                         | 0.396   |
| Above poverty threshold | 77.51                 | 75.72                   |         |
| Below poverty threshold | 22.49                 | 24.28                   |         |

## RESULTS (cont'd)

Figure 1. Descriptive Statistics of Young Women (Ages 18-25) With and Without an Arrest History

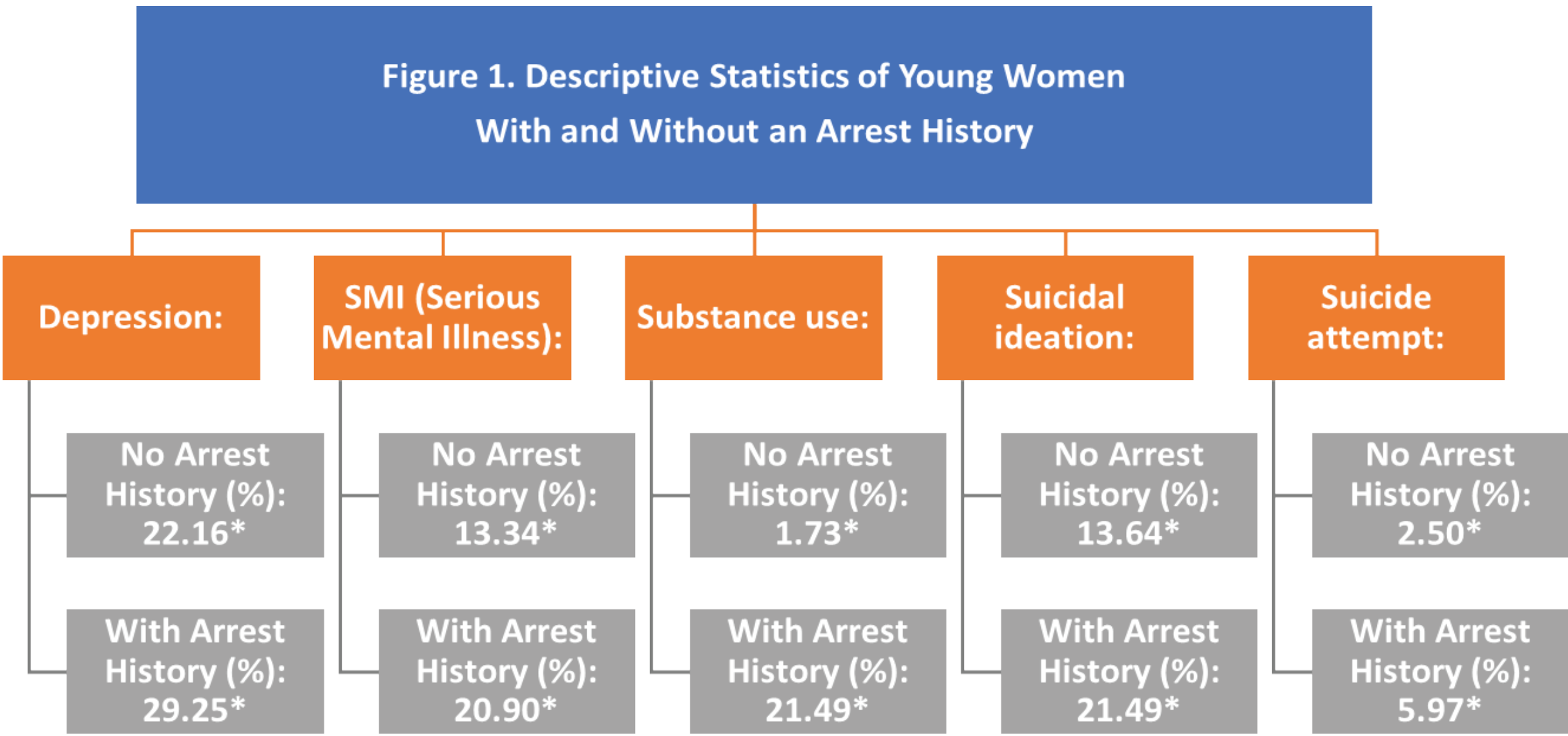


Figure 2. Descriptive Statistics of Young Men (Ages 18-25) With and Without an Arrest History (2021)

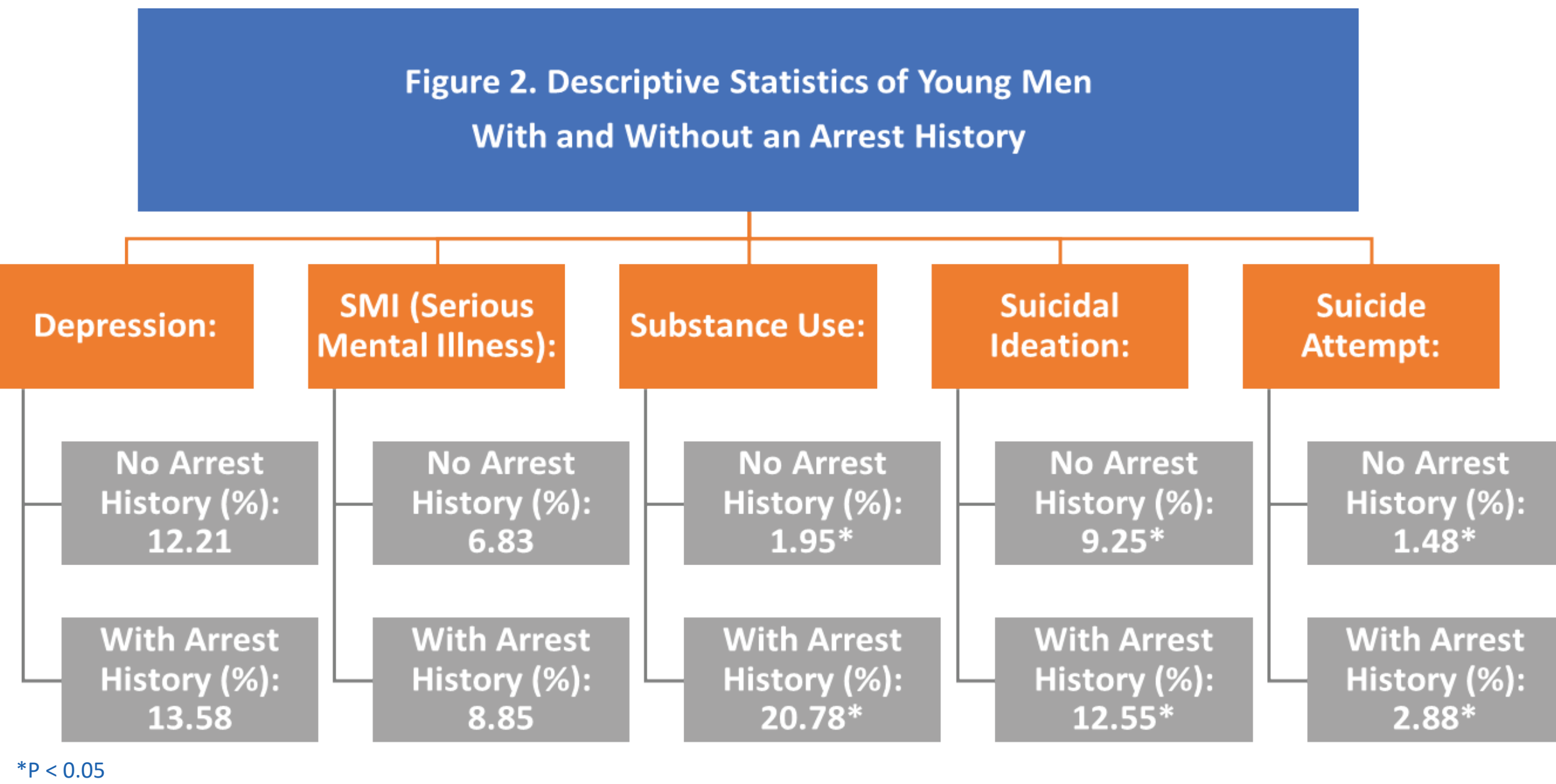
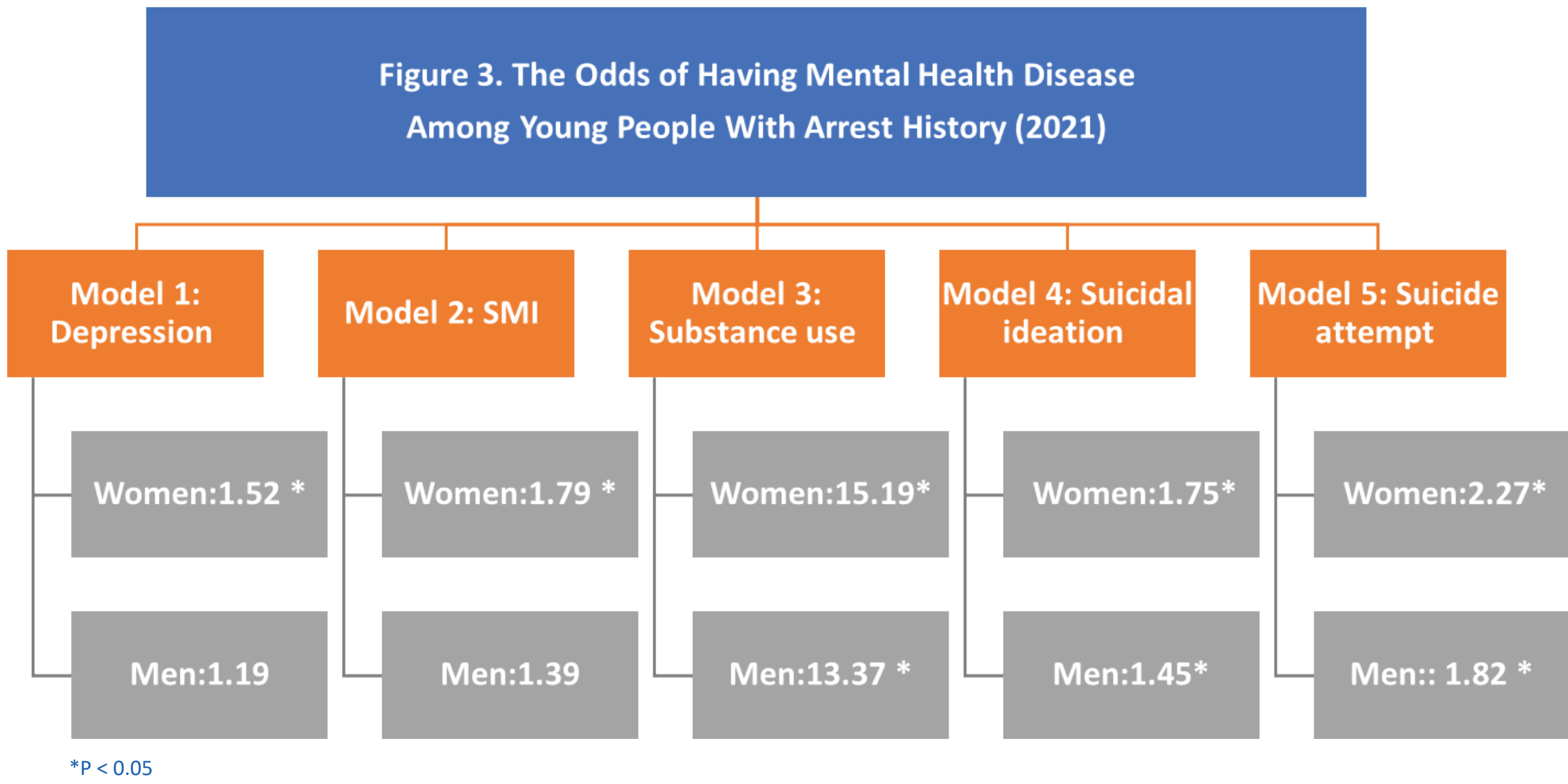


Figure 3. The Odds of Having Mental Health Disease Among Young People With Arrest History (2021)



### Limitations:

- Self-reported measures (arrest history, education, income, mental health) are susceptible to bias.
- Excluded groups: Homeless individuals not using shelters, active military, and institutional residents are not covered.
- Response rates may be higher for arrest history and mental illness due to excluded groups.

## CONCLUSION

- Strong link between arrest history and mental health issues in young adults.
- Young women with arrest history have an increased risk of developing a mental health disease.
- Young men with arrest history have a higher association of substance use disorder and suicide.
- Providing arrestees with appropriate mental health care at the point of arrest, in the correctional facility, and before a release from incarceration would benefit society.

## REFERENCES

- Statista. Number of arrests for all offenses in the United States from 1990 to 2021. Statista Research Department. 2023. Accessed October 26, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/191261/number-of-arrests-for-all-offenses-in-the-us-since-1990/>
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